

**Urban Ageing, Spatial Agency:**  
Generating creative agency through the  
medium of cohousing

M E Hammond

2017

**Urban Ageing, Spatial Agency:**  
Generating creative agency through the  
medium of cohousing

Mark Edward Hammond

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the Manchester  
Metropolitan University for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

Manchester School of Architecture  
Manchester Metropolitan University

2017

# Acknowledgements

This research was kindly supported by Age-Friendly Manchester (Manchester City Council) and the Manchester School of Art Research Centre. I would like to thank Paul McGarry from Age-Friendly Manchester for his enduring dedication to innovation and research, without which this research would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my supervisory team for their support over the course of my research. I am grateful to Dr. Annie Shaw, whose resolute guidance and encouragement helped me through some challenging periods, and to Prof. Chris Phillipson, whose lifelong dedication to the field of ageing continues to inspire me. I would like to give a special thanks to Prof. Stefan White, whose mentorship over the last decade has had a profound impact my academic and professional development. I am grateful not just for the intellectual challenges he has posed during this research, but for the friendship and support that has come with it.

I am grateful to the members of Manchester Urban Cohousing (MUCH) for the opportunity to work together. I could not have wished to partner with a more creative, dedicated or knowledgeable group of individuals, and their innumerable contributions to my research are greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank the numerous family and friends who offered me encouragement and patience over the course of my research. In particular, I would like to thank my sister Lorna and my parents David and Helen, whose unwavering support for my academic pursuits has been humbling.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my partner Hannah Sevenoaks. This research would not have been possible without the support and inspiration she continues to give me, and I am forever grateful for the sacrifices she has endured over the last 4 years. I look forward to a lifetime of repaying this debt.



# Abstract

Population ageing and urbanisation are two of the defining social changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but many older people experience a loss of agency within society. Cohousing presents a potential medium for older citizens to increase their agency, but this is limited by the current conception of the architect-cohouser relationship. Spatial Agency provides an alternative approach to architectural practice in cohousing, based on the inclusion of citizens in architectural processes. This thesis investigates the limitations and opportunities of using spatial agency as the basis of the architect's role in older people's cohousing across two parts; a theoretical expansion of spatial agency in relation to existing examples of cohousing, and a practical testing of this expanded approach through a live collaboration.

The first part of the thesis develops a hybrid theoretical framework for spatial agency that marries Bourdieu's theories of 'habitus' and 'field' with Giddens' concept of 'structuration'. This interprets agency as the capability to act creatively, produced by conceiving design as a mutually enabling discourse. The second part of the thesis tests this expanded interpretation of spatial agency through a two-year design-research collaboration with Manchester Urban Cohousing (MUCH), an older people's cohousing group. This identifies barriers to spatial agency in cohousing and proposes how they may be overcome. This is achieved through practices that develop a spatial discourse between architect and cohouser, empowering all parties to act creatively through the exposure to ideas and knowledge that is otherwise unavailable to them. This enables the architect and cohouser to negotiate and realise their social, political and ethical vision through creative action.

# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Figures</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms</b> .....	<b>x</b>

## **PART ONE**

<b>1 Introduction: Spatial Ageing and older people’s cohousing</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Spatial Agency.....	1
1.2 Research questions.....	2
1.3 Cohousing, the architect and the Age-Friendly City.....	3
1.4 Research Approach .....	9
1.5 Thesis structure .....	11
<b>2 Three waves of cohousing</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Definitions of cohousing .....	15
2.2 First Wave .....	27
2.3 Second Wave.....	38
2.4 Third Wave.....	45
2.5 Conclusion: Cohousing and Spatial Agency .....	57
<b>3 Three parameters of Spatial Agency</b> .....	<b>59</b>
3.1 Architecture and spatial agency .....	60
3.2 Cohousing and the theory of structuration .....	69
3.3 Structure and mutual knowledge .....	74
3.4 Agency and negotiated habitus.....	83
3.5 Structuration and shared creativity.....	89
3.6 Conclusion: Spatial agency as a practical methodology .....	93
<b>4 Methodology: Spatial agency and design-research</b> .....	<b>95</b>
4.1 Literature review .....	96
4.2 Practical methodology: Research through design .....	97
4.3 Communicative methodology: Critical autoethnography.....	107
4.4 Manchester Urban Cohousing.....	113
4.5 Conclusion: Research through design.....	120

## **PART TWO**

<b>5 Mutual Knowledge.....</b>	<b>123</b>
5.1 The architect as a disempowering agent.....	124
5.2 Examining the perceived value of knowledge .....	129
5.3 Using design as a means of developing trust .....	136
5.4 Conclusion: Challenges to mutual knowledge .....	149
<b>6 Negotiated Habitus.....</b>	<b>153</b>
6.1 The rationale and limits of consensus .....	154
6.2 Accommodating difference.....	156
6.3 Challenging the primacy of the imagined collective .....	163
6.4 Design as a medium of negotiation .....	169
6.5 Conclusion: Negotiation as means of creativity .....	182
<b>7 Shared Creativity .....</b>	<b>185</b>
7.1 Identifying a sense of limits .....	186
7.2 Narrative as a means of overcoming self-imposed limits .....	194
7.3 Exploring sense of limits through shared critique .....	198
7.4 Building design as a means of expanding creative discourse .....	203
7.5 Conclusion: The spatial agent's role in overcoming a sense of limits.....	216
<b>8 Discussion: Cohousing as a medium of spatial agency .....</b>	<b>219</b>
8.1 Summary of findings.....	219
8.2 Expanding spatial agency .....	223
8.3 Wider implications of spatial agency .....	230
8.4 Limitations of study and recommendations for further research .....	240
<b>9 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Overview of practices .....</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Transcript of focus group.....</b>	<b>273</b>

# Table of Figures

Figure 1: Estimated numbers of cohousing communities in selected countries.....	18
Figure 2: Timeline of the three waves of cohousing .....	23
Figure 3: Architect-Cohouser relationship types within the three waves of cohousing .....	26
Figure 4: Exterior of John Ericssongaten 6 .....	29
Figure 5: The restaurant and dining room of John Ericssongaten 6 (date unknown) .....	30
Figure 6: Diagram of Sættedammen and Skråplanet development chronology.....	32
Figure 7: Skråplanet Cohousing site plan .....	33
Figure 8: Sættedammen Cohousing site plan .....	33
Figure 9: Sættedammen Cohousing in Hillerød, Denmark.....	34
Figure 10: Skråplanet Cohousing in Værlose, Denmark .....	34
Figure 11: Older Women’s Cohousing in Barnet, London .....	51
Figure 12: Exterior of Loppukiri Cohousing in Helsinki, Finland.....	55
Figure 13: Photo of Tinggården Cohousing .....	67
Figure 14: Photo of Springhill Cohousing .....	68
Figure 15: Conceptual diagram of Giddens’ structuration approach .....	71
Figure 16: Conceptual diagram of the hybrid theory of structuration .....	73
Figure 17: Linear workshop development process .....	99
Figure 18: Reflexive workshop development process.....	100
Figure 19: Map showing the current residential locations of MUCH members .....	117
Figure 20: Diagram of Identifying Skills workshop .....	130
Figure 21: Diagram of Albany Road design charrette.....	137
Figure 22: Site analysis sketch from Albany Road workshop .....	139
Figure 23: Bjarke Ingels and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall touring 8-House on 'Scandimania' .....	141
Figure 24: 8 House in Copenhagen, Denmark .....	142
Figure 25: Sketches from Albany Road design workshop .....	142
Figure 26: Albany Road model.....	146
Figure 27: Diagram of Storyteller workshop .....	157
Figure 28: MUCH members participating in storyteller workshop.....	158
Figure 29: Bourdieu's concept of field - doxa and discourse.....	162
Figure 30: Photo of Lancaster Cohousing .....	164

Figure 31: Timber decking installed over original steel balcony at Lancaster Cohousing .....	165
Figure 32: Example of physical adaptations at Lancaster Cohousing .....	166
Figure 33: Diagram of SATCHEL design charrette .....	172
Figure 34: MSA students and SATCHEL delegates in conversation.....	174
Figure 35: MSA student documenting conversation through diagrams and sketches.....	175
Figure 36: MSA students creating a conceptual model based on their negotiated design .....	176
Figure 37: Example of conceptual model made by MSA students .....	177
Figure 38: MSA students presenting their designs back to the SATCHEL delegates .....	178
Figure 39: Examples of MSA student works.....	180
Figure 40: Diagram of design game workshop.....	186
Figure 41: MUCH members taking part in Design Game workshop .....	189
Figure 42: Otto Wagner's tiled 'Majolikahaus' building in Vienna, Austria .....	191
Figure 43: Rooftop communal space and terrace at Loppukiri Cohousing .....	201
Figure 44: Diagram of Elbow Street Design Charrette.....	204
Figure 45: MUCH members outside the Atlas Engineering Works .....	205
Figure 46: Perspective overview of Elbow Street proposal .....	208
Figure 47: Diagrammatic plan of Elbow Street design.....	207
Figure 48: Perspective of communal space within the shell of the Atlas Engineering Works .....	208
Figure 49: Street perspective of Elbow Street design.....	213
Figure 50: Matrix showing the expansion of spatial agency approach .....	221
Figure 51: Site Plan and development timeline for N Street Cohousing in Davis, California, USA .....	248

# Glossary of Terms

*Agency:* The capability for an individual to act based on their own choices.

*Atelier:* A workshop or studio in which a designer or artist works. Often used to describe an architectural firm, or a teaching group in schools of architecture.

*Charrette:* A collaborative design workshop, in which participants attempt to respond to a problem or brief within a short period of time.

*Contingency:* Uncertainty. A concept used by Jeremy Till to critique architects, who he argues deny the contingency they operate within (Till 2007).

*Contingent practice:* An architectural process that embraces the uncertainty that it operates within, and the need for practices to be developed in response to opportunities and constraints as they arise.

*Desktop study:* A short analysis of a site and surrounding area undertaken without a site visit itself. These often explore the site access, surrounding buildings, geographical features and local amenities.

*Habitus:* A system of dispositions that organise how individuals perceive and respond to society. A concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977).

*Spatial Agency:* An alternative conception of architectural practice proposed by Nishat Awan, Tatiana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2011). Based the rejection of 'buildings' as the sole expression of architectural knowledge, and the inclusion of other people into architectural practice.

*Structure:* The material, cultural and social systems of society.

*Structuration*: A social theory that agency and structure operate as a duality, rather than one taking precedent over the other. A concept proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984).

# Part One

# 1 Introduction: Spatial Ageing and older people's cohousing

"I think one of the challenges for all of us, and you, is to come up with our own ageing, and not be influenced by images of what older people look like. We are using each other to future-scope ourselves, in space. That's really exciting! The ability to let us consider our ageing as a positive asset rather than a form of disability where we would all be stuck in those awful chairs. It's been a real challenge because we all have these different ideas of futures, and the shape and space needs to mirror and enable that."

(Lydia, member of Manchester Urban Cohousing)

## 1.1 Spatial Agency

This thesis examines, expands and tests the use of 'spatial agency' as the basis of the architect's role in older people's cohousing. This study is based on an understanding that older people seek to develop cohousing as a way of increasing their agency – their capability to live their life and shape their city based on their own determinations. This process is enabled by the architect, one of many professionals with whom older people interact to create their cohousing community. Although there are many existing interpretations of the architect within the field of cohousing, this thesis proposes that the architect's role should be that of the 'spatial agent'.

Developed by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till (2011), 'spatial agency' offers a purposefully broad conception of the socially engaged architect – a call for architects to seek new forms of practice, rather than determining the specific nature of these practices. Spatial agency sets out an alternative understanding of the architect and their interactions with others. This is predicated on the adoption of two positions in their practice; the "...inclusion of others, amateurs, in the processes" and the "...rejection of the building as the

sole source and representation of expertise.” (Awan et al. 2011:43). Awan et al. identify cohousing as a site of spatial agency, although it is only explored sparingly in their research. This thesis develops and tests an expanded definition of spatial agency that responds to the specific conditions that emerge within cohousing.

The expanded definition of spatial agency was developed through a two-year design-research collaboration with Manchester Urban Cohousing (MUCH). I was first introduced to MUCH through Age-friendly Manchester - a section of Manchester City Council who also sponsored this research. MUCH are a group of older people from Manchester, UK attempting to build their own cohousing community. Cohousing can be described as an ‘intentional community’ consisting of private dwellings with shared facilities. They are often resident initiated, developed and managed, with a focus on strong internal social connections through shared labour and activities.

I took on the role of the spatial agent in my collaboration with MUCH, identifying the constraints, contradictions and opportunities of this approach through both a theoretical examination of spatial agency, and through real interactions with MUCH members. As a result, this thesis develops a conceptualisation of spatial agency as a social and spatial discourse that enables the citizen and architect to increase their capability to act through creative interactions. These interactions enable the development of creativity – a conscious deviation from expected behaviour based on the desires and dispositions of the individual.

## **1.2 Research questions**

This thesis seeks to determine how the architect’s interactions with older cohousers can increase their capabilities through a mutual process of empowerment. By developing an expanded definition of spatial agency, this thesis aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the limits to agency within the existing field of cohousing?
- How can spatial agency be further developed to overcome the limits to agency identified in cohousing?
- What challenges and opportunities arise from the applications of spatial agency in practice?
- How does the adoption of spatial agency in cohousing affect the cohouser and architect's ability to act creatively?
- What is the potential for this expanded form of spatial agency to contribute to wider fields of social practice, such as the age-friendly city?

### **1.3 Cohousing, the architect and the Age-Friendly City**

#### **Urban ageing**

The age-friendly cities approach seeks to respond to two of the defining societal changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - population ageing and urbanisation. The prevention of premature death and increase in human longevity through medical, political and social development is arguably one of humanity's greatest achievements, but the social and economic challenges it poses cannot be understated. The proportion of people who are aged 60 and over is projected to reach 22% by 2050, an increase from 11% in 2007. This means there will be around 1.2 billion people more people aged 60 and over by 2050, compared to today (United Nations Population Fund 2012:9–12, 19). Whilst much of this growth will occur in the developing world, older people will represent a higher proportion of the total population in developed countries. In Europe, 34% of the population will be aged 60 and over by 2050, with the majority of these living in urban settings (World Health Organisation 2007:3–4).

The impact of an ageing population can be seen in multiple sectors of society in areas as diverse as healthcare, housing and employment. Much of the societal discourse on ageing has focused on the 'deficits' of older people (Handler

2014a:118). This conceptualisation of ageing as a ‘problem’ has been linked to the primacy of ‘capitalism’ within society and urban development, with capital investments in housing and cultural opportunities disproportionately favouring the needs of younger professionals (Phillipson 2007:334). As a result, retirement and the loss of earning potential can lead to older people being understood as a burden that requires mitigation, ignoring the other contributions older people make to society (Phillipson 1982:7, 19). A consequence of this for many older people is a loss of agency within society, which should be understood as a systemic, multi-dimensional consequence of the urban environment rather than an individual deficit of the person.

The loss of agency results in older people’s marginalisation from the decision-making processes through which the city is produced. Phillipson argues that “...a substantial group of older people have much less freedom to influence the physical and social environment of which they are a part” (Phillipson 2007:330) and that many older people are “...relatively disempowered from the option of managing community and neighbourhood change.” (Phillipson 2007:336).

The UK ‘housing crisis’ is an example of how population ageing impacts society and demonstrates the importance of agency in determining policy and practice. Rather than viewing an ageing population and the housing challenges that come with it as a negative for older people, these demographic shifts can be understood as an opportunity for older people not just to maintain agency but to explore innovative ways to increase it.

Older people’s housing is currently conceptualised in environmental gerontology as a dialectic between the concept of ageing in place and moving home in later life (Peace et al. 2012:137). Proponents of ageing in place argue that there is a positive relationship between agency and the maintenance of stable relationships with a home and a local community. Reasons for this include the power derived from a sense of ownership of a home (Heywood, Oldman, and Means 2002:31), being part of a vibrant and rich social dynamic within mixed communities (Lawton 1998:26), a sense of belonging derived from

the development of physical familiarity, social neighbourly bonds and an autobiographical 'insideness' based on an individual's image of themselves within a place (Rowles 1983:114).

The vast majority of older people in the UK live in mainstream housing, with specialist housing options for older people primarily serving a market based on medical need rather than aspiration (Savills World Research 2015:6). As a result, moving home in later in life is often understood as a negative or forced move, even when it is an expression of an individual's agency to recognise the consequence of both options and to judge which option will allow them to maintain self-identity (Peace 2010; Peace, Holland, and Kellaher 2011). Although the current discourse regarding ageing in place and moving home in later life has a tendency to focus on transitions from mainstream to sheltered or care settings, Peace et al. identify cohousing as an area of potential research that offers a novel insight into the relationship between environment and identity. (Peace, Holland, and Kellaher 2006:161).

### **Older Agency**

Linking agency to stability and neighbourly bonds gained through long-term residency demonstrates the need for innovative ways of enabling older people to maintain or increase their active involvement in urban decision-making. The number of older people in unsecure, private rental is projected to rise as homeownership becomes increasingly unaffordable (Age UK 2016:1), leading to less stable neighbourhood populations as a result of rent volatility. In addition, the services and community assets through which some neighbourly bonds are created are being increasingly withdrawn due to reduced public spending (such as the closure of libraries or community centre) or broader socio-economic changes (such as the closure of public houses).

In response to this, some older people are seeking other ways to increase their agency in later life. For some, this is achieved through new residential or community settings based on a desire to have positive new experiences. Examples of this include 'snowbirds' in the USA, who leave northern states to

re-locate to Florida to increase opportunities for leisure and socialisation, and older Jewish people who move to Israel for both altruistic and adventurous pursuits (Kahana and Kahana 1983:214–20). Both of these demonstrate how the pro-active, self-initiated decision to change residential environment provides a “...meaningful avenue for the elderly to extend themselves into the future, to find meaningful new stimulation and roles, and to enhance their satisfaction during later life” (Kahana and Kahana 1983:211).

Others seek to develop ways of increasing older people's agency within existing neighbourhood structures, through programmes such as the age-friendly neighbourhood movement. Projects such as ‘Age-friendly New York City’ (2009) and the series of Age-friendly Neighbourhoods projects within Manchester (Buffel 2015; Phillipson, White, and Hammond 2012) all adopt different approaches, but have a shared aim of empowering older people to generate systemic change within their neighbourhoods, and to increase their agency to shape local policy, funding priorities and service provision (Manchester City Council 2009).

An example of this is Manchester City Council’s ‘Age-Friendly Manchester’ team, who also sponsored this research. Their remit is to make Manchester an ‘Age-friendly City’, which is defined as a supportive environment in which older people can shape the policies that affect them, and are empowered to realise social change through their interaction with other city ‘agents’, such as academics and architects. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) ‘Age-friendly Cities’ approach can be understood as a global response to the loss of agency many older people experience based on the societal conception of ageing from a deficit perspective. The central tenet of the Age-friendly Cities approach is the promotion of ‘Active Ageing’ – the opportunities for older people to participate in all areas of society in a way that values the diversity of capabilities older people might have.

Whilst ‘housing’ is one of the key domains of an age-friendly city, older people’s cohousing should not be understood as seeking to find a solution to a problem

of housing older people. The age-friendly city provides opportunities for older citizens to increase their agency through the interaction with others, be that in the creation of cohousing, between neighbours, in a sheltered housing scheme, or across a whole neighbourhood.

The Age-friendly approach provides a suitable context in which to explore the concept of spatial agency. Handler argues that ‘age-friendly’ allows designers to explore “...notions of spatial justice and rights to the city” and presents an opportunity for creative practices that are not solely limited to the production of formal expression. She asserts that the age-friendly platform facilitates the possibility for a “...more experimental, participatory and empowering engagement” to emerge, based on the opportunity for the designer to explore the relationship between citizens and the city (Handler 2014b:17–18).

Spatial agency is a concept developed within Sheffield School of Architecture by ‘The Agency’ research centre. The theory was published in *‘Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture’* (Awan et al. 2011), which won the 2011 RIBA President’s Award for Outstanding University based research. Spatial agency is part of a long tradition of critical architecture within architectural research, which seeks to challenge the relationship between architectural criticism, theory and practice to present alternative forms of architectural expression.

Spatial agency calls for architect to re-engage with political, ecological, professional and pedagogical qualities of their practice – to explore how citizens experience the city and work with them to develop innovative responses that challenge the orthodox systems of urban development (Awan et al. 2011:37–51). This requires the architect to reject their role as the autonomous creator of purely aesthetic or technical form (Awan et al. 2011:27–28), and instead understand that their role is “...not *the* agent of change, but one among many agents.” (Schneider and Till 2009:97). Spatial agency seeks to show that architects have the opportunity to express their knowledge through different media, including but not limited to built form. This could include the subversion of urban policy, the promotion of marginalised groups in the city and the

political activation of residents through shared endeavour (Awan et al. 2011:56–58).

### **Cohousing and older people**

Older people’s cohousing is a potential site of spatial agency. Cohousing is often developed through participatory design approaches, which suggests an opportunity for the architect to expand the boundaries of their practice. In addition, the social, political and ethical focus of some cohousing groups enables the architect to engage in the social context of their practices.

Cohousing is a type of housing community that features individually owned residences and collectively owned communal spaces. These are usually resident-initiated and collectively managed, with many placing emphasis on communal labour, activities and the creation of an intentional social community. The rationales that underpin the creation of cohousing communities are diverse, ranging from desires for greater gender equality (Durrett and McCamant 2011:40–41; Sargisson 2012:32); creating affordable housing in response to the UK housing crisis (LILAC 2014); and generating opportunities for people live more environmentally sustainable lifestyles (Lancaster Cohousing 2015). A recent development in the field of cohousing is *‘older people’s cohousing’*<sup>1</sup>. These are communities specifically created to cater for older people, and have become an established sub-section of the cohousing movement in the last 15 years (Brenton 2013; Durrett 2009; Loppukiri Cohousing n.d.). The increasing interest in older people’s cohousing can be linked to the transitions of aspirational baby boomers into older age, who seek “...an alternative to living alone but reject conventional forms of housing for older people as paternalistic and institutional.” (Scanlon and Arrigoitia 2015:107)

Older people’s cohousing is notable because it offers a novel way of exploring issues related to ageing in relation to the micro and macro scale environments that affect older people’s experience of the city. At a micro-scale, it can offer a

---

<sup>1</sup> This is also commonly referred to as ‘senior cohousing’, particularly in the USA (Durrett 2009). This thesis will use the term of ‘older people’, which is a more widely used term in the UK.

third way of considering the current duality of 'ageing in place' and 'moving on' in later life, whilst at a macro-scale, it provides a route for individuals to challenge broad societal conditions. One such group pursuing cohousing as a means of generating new capabilities as they grow older are MUCH, whose motivations are partly grounded in a desire to challenge the marginalisation of older people within society. For MUCH, cohousing is the medium through which they can realise the 'age-friendly city'.

## **1.4 Research Approach**

Thus far, the field of cohousing has adopted a relatively traditional conception of the architect as a form maker and the cohousing group as a commercial client. By adopting spatial agency as the basis of my collaboration with MUCH, this research generates two interrelated contributions to knowledge. It identifies the challenges and opportunities of the spatial agency approach within the specific context of cohousing, and in doing so demonstrates the benefits and limits of spatial agency as an alternative conception of the architect-client relationship.

A design-research approach is employed as the basis of my interactions with MUCH and is used to identify situations in which the agency of architect or cohouser was limited and how these limits could be overcome. The collaboration between myself and MUCH was not pre-defined at the outset, but developed through continual reflections as opportunities to interact emerged.

The collaboration with MUCH focuses on the project-defining period of the group's development. This is the period in which the group attempted to recruit members, developed their collective vision and test the feasibility of their ideas. This precedes the building design phase, in which these ideas are manifest as a physical community. As a result of this, the central concern of the collaboration was not the creation of a building, but the creation of interactions whereby myself and the cohousers could share their expertise, accommodate the different desires of the group, and enable each other to act creatively. I was not commissioned by MUCH to design a building for their community, as the group

had neither the land, finance, membership or shared vision to produce a design brief when our collaboration began. Instead, my role was to working alongside MUCH as a design-researcher, contributing to their overall development trajectory by integrating design knowledge into their processes. Whilst formal, architectonic design was used as a way of enabling the group to increase their capability and develop a vision for the community, these interactions were not limited to design. This is in keeping with the spatial agency approach, which argues that the architect's key responsibility is not the refinement of static form (Schneider and Till 2009:38).

From the outset, the MUCH group were aware that the collaboration was part of a doctoral research project and the relationship was based on a mutual desire for knowledge, not a contract to deliver design services. This provided opportunities to develop practices that were not determined by a required end-goal, but instead sought to help the group define the project there were creating. Examples of these practices included a group trip to Finland to share a seminar with another older people's cohousing group, developing an event with architecture students in Manchester as part of an EU funded adult learning programme, attending meetings with housing executives from the city council, developing collaborative design charrettes and undertaking field trips together.

This collaboration identified three parameters that contribute to an expanded definition of spatial agency; mutual knowledge, negotiated habitus and shared creativity. Each of these parameters was developed through the identification of a constraining situation, in which preconceptions of the architect-client relationship prevented both agents from increasing their agency. In response to these limiting situations, MUCH and I developed practices through which our agency could be increased, and in doing so propose how the theory of spatial agency could be expanded.

The knowledge that emerged through these interactions is communicated in this thesis through a series of analytical autoethnographies. This approach was used in order to communicate not only the interactions between myself and the

members of MUCH but also the rationale for the choices I made and the intended and unintended consequences of these actions. All of these are reflected upon through the critical framework of spatial agency in order to both generate further practices, but also identify the limits and opportunities of the spatial agency approach.

## **1.5 Thesis structure**

The thesis is structured in two parts, followed by discussion and conclusion chapters.

*Part One* establishes the conditions, methodology and practical approach that informed my practices with MUCH.

*Part Two* takes the form of three analytical autoethnographies of the practices developed with the MUCH group. It is structured in terms of the three parameters of spatial agency proposed in this thesis, with each chapter identifying situations in which the cohousers or my own agency was limited and the practices developed through collaboration to increase our agency in response.

### **Part One**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction – Spatial Agency and Older People’s Cohousing**

The current chapter sets out the context and objectives of this research. It introduces the key themes of ageing, spatial agency and cohousing, and outlines the approach through which they will be explored.

#### **Chapter 2: The Three Waves of Cohousing**

This chapter defines ‘cohousing’ as a concept and develops a critical analysis of the forms of ‘participatory design’ involved in the creation of cohousing. Through a series of case studies, this chapter demonstrates how the architect-cohouser relationship has changed across the ‘three waves’ of cohousing that

have occurred between the 1970s and the present day. This is used to establish the need for socially engaged practices to underpin older people's cohousing, with spatial agency identified as a means of exploring this.

### **Chapter 3: Three Parameters of Spatial Agency**

This chapter constructs the theoretical and methodological approach deployed in my practices with MUCH. It identifies how spatial agency is able to increase and limit the agency of both the architect and citizen, and proposes an alternative theoretical framework of spatial agency through which these can be overcome. This is based on the hybridisation of Giddens and Bourdieu's theories of agency and structure. This is used to propose an expanded definition of spatial agency based on mutual knowledge, negotiated habitus and shared creativity.

### **Chapter 4: Methodology – Spatial Agency and Design-Research**

This chapter outlines the practical application of spatial agency within my practices with MUCH. It establishes both the practical methodology that informed the collaboration, as well as the communicative methodology through which it was recorded, articulated and analysed. The practical methodology is based on a 'research through design' approach, which is communicated through a series of autoethnographies – critical narratives that explore the interactions between architect and cohouser, and the reflexive rationale for the decisions I made. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the MUCH group who partnered in this collaboration, including their origins, membership and motivations.

## **Part Two**

### **Chapter 5: Mutual Knowledge**

This chapter identifies mutual knowledge as a parameter of spatial agency in cohousing. It discusses how the presumption of expert/non-expert dynamics between the architect and citizen limited the agency of the MUCH members by

engendering a distrust of the architect as a powerful but closed agent. It outlines attempts to overcome these limitations through the conception of both the architect and cohouser as spatial agents and sets out the manifestation of these new relationships of knowledge within a range of design-research activities.

### **Chapter 6: Negotiated Habitus**

This Chapter establishes how the negotiation between ‘the individual’ and ‘the collective’ in cohousing was problematic for the MUCH group. This chapter documents the shift from a model of consensus as a way of overcoming difference, towards the model of negotiated habitus, in which the divergent desires and dispositions held by the MUCH members were mediated through spatial composition, rather than agreement by all of a single model of accommodation.

### **Chapter 7: Shared Creativity**

This chapter examines how each MUCH member’s agency was initially constrained by a general expectation that the architect would act as their creative agent, and the consequential reduction of the opportunities for individuals in the group to affect each other. This was overcome by a conceptualisation of MUCH as shared, creative discourse. This process involved creating opportunities to explore and spatialise the orthodox and heterodox ideas that had emerged within the group, and identify the underdeveloped elements of the group’s discourse. This created the opportunity for shared creativity to be realised, based on the interaction between knowledgeable agents who were mutually empowering each other to generate ideas that otherwise could not have emerged.

### **Chapter 8: Discussion – Cohousing as a medium of spatial agency**

This chapter explores the implications the findings generated through my collaborations with MUCH, situating these findings within the wider fields of architecture, urban ageing and cohousing. It outlines both the benefits to cohousing from adopting spatial agency as a means of supporting the realisation of creativity and the implications of this approach to spatial agency within the

architectural profession. This chapter also reviews the limitations of the study, and suggest opportunities for further research in the fields of architecture and cohousing studies, particularly in broader contexts of urban ageing such as the Age-friendly City/Neighbourhood.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This chapter summarises the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes. It concludes by proposing a possible trajectory of older people's cohousing in the UK, and the role of the spatial agent in realising this approach

## **2 Three waves of cohousing**

This chapter identifies how the field of cohousing has come to be defined, and the limits and opportunities that it presents for both cohousers and architects. It begins by providing an overview of cohousing, outlining the social aims, architectural forms, organisational structures as established within existing academic and policy literature. Through this, a limitation of the current cohousing discourse can be determined– an uncritical understanding of the ‘participatory design’ processes and the interactions between the cohouser and the architect.

Using a series of case studies, this chapter will show how architect-cohouser relationships have changed in response to the different contexts in which cohousing is developed, and propose why these changes have occurred. This is demonstrated by identifying the different roles for the architect within what will be termed the three ‘waves’ of cohousing that have emerged since the 1970s. The analysis is informed by both academic sources and more informal practitioner accounts, such as development blogs made by cohousing groups, marketing materials from architects and conversations undertaken during field trips to cohousing communities.

### **2.1 Definitions of cohousing**

#### **The state of cohousing and cohousing research**

Whilst the field of cohousing draws interest from a diverse range of disciplines such as urban planning (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012), geography (Chatterton 2013), gerontology (Brenton 1999, 2012) and politics (Sargisson 2012), architects play a prominent role in producing influential cohousing research. Two of the main figures within the cohousing field are Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant, both architects and cohousing practitioners who have produced a number of guides aimed at prospective cohousing groups (Durrett 2009; Durrett and McCamant 2011). In addition, architects such as Fromm

(1991) and Meltzer (2005) have undertaken major works which analyse the spatial characteristics of cohousing communities through spatial case study analysis, with Meltzer developing the widely cited model that suggests that cohousing emerged in three distinct 'waves', each seeking different social goals.

At present, there is a focus within the cohousing field on generating descriptive accounts of the physical and social manifestations of cohousing within existing communities. The majority of this research is retrospective and focuses on analysing existing cohousing communities through either qualitative research, spatial analysis or a combination of the two (Tummers 2016). Although architects are prominent within the field of cohousing, there is surprisingly little research concerning the architect-cohouser relationship within cohousing, with focus instead placed on the designs that architects produce. To further understand the nature of architect-cohousers interactions, this section will analyse the current research within the field to identify the gaps of knowledge with regards the role of the architect.

Broadly speaking, cohousing is a residential community with both individually owned private dwellings and collectively owned, shared facilities (Meltzer 2005:3). Durrett suggests that there are six components of cohousing: a participatory design process; neighbourhood design that encourages a sense of community; common facilities designed to compliment private dwellings; resident management and decision making; non-hierarchical management structures; and residents having separate income sources (Durrett 2009:19). Although cohousing began to be recognised as a distinct model of collective living in the 1970s (Meltzer 2005:3), some or all of the six components of cohousing identified by Durrett can be seen throughout history - from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Beguine monasteries for widows in the crusades (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012) to co-operative housekeeping societies of Victorian England (Coates 2011).

Communities come in a variety of sizes and locations, from urban high-rise to rural and suburban detached dwelling. All are generally managed by the residents themselves through non-hierarchical structures (Durrett 2009:19). The concept is situated on the spectrum of collective housing, and can be described as a middle-ground between cooperative housing ('build it together') and communes ('serving a common ideal'). Unlike cooperatives, cohousing is based on an expectation of social communal activities, usually through shared meals and activities. Unlike communes, residents in cohousing are financial independent of each other, and are less driven by the realisation of common purpose (Korpela 2012:336).

From its origins in Scandinavia and the Netherlands in the 1970s, cohousing has spread throughout the developed world, particularly to other European countries, USA, Japan, Australia, New Zealand (Ruiu 2014:321). The lack of government data makes it difficult to ascertain how many people live in cohousing or how many cohousing communities exist. Figure 1 shows estimates of the numbers of cohousing communities in selected countries where information is available.

	UK <sup>2</sup>	USA <sup>3</sup>	Netherlands <sup>4</sup>	Denmark <sup>5</sup>	Sweden <sup>6</sup>
Completed cohousing communities	19	163	284	Between 50,000 and 200,000 residents	42
Cohousing communities in development	55	135	59	No data	15

Figure 1: Estimated numbers of cohousing communities in selected countries

Cohousing is currently most popular in Northern European countries where cohousing originated. It is most popular in Denmark, but estimates of the number of people living in cohousing vary widely from 50,000 to 200,000. In other countries, the only available data is through cohousing groups submitting their own information to national networks and associations like The Cohousing Association (USA) and the UK Cohousing network, who maintain online databases of communities. As such, these databases potentially understate the number of cohousing communities, but provide the best estimates of the number of cohousing schemes in these countries. This data confirms that, despite a growing interest in the approach, cohousing remains a marginal, niche housing typology.

<sup>2</sup> Based on self-reporting to the 'UK Cohousing Association', as of January 2017 (UK Cohousing Network n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> Based on self-reporting to 'The Cohousing Association' as of January 2017 (The Cohousing Association n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> Based on self-reporting to the 'Federatie Gemeenschappelijk Wonen', the Dutch national collective housing association, as of May 2017 (Gemeenschappelijk Wonen 2017)

<sup>5</sup> Lower estimate of 50,000 provided by (Lietaert 2007), higher estimate of 200,000 provided by (Horelli and Vespa 1994:209)

<sup>6</sup> Based on membership to 'Kollektivehus NU', the Swedish national cohousing association as of 2010 (Kollektivehus NU 2010)

Tummers suggests 5 themes within the academic field of cohousing: Advocacy, social ideals, architecture and designing community (i.e. design process), neighbourhood development (i.e. architectural forms) and organisational structures. This can be further distilled to four themes, as advocacy acts as an overarching theme in cohousing research, which often seeks to validate the positive social outcomes within the model (Tummers 2016:2027–32).

### **Architectural forms and organisation structures**

The study of architectural forms in cohousing has focused on the ways that physical design can promote social interactions between residents (Ruiu 2014:321). One facet of this is the size of cohousing communities. Although the optimal number of dwellings in cohousing varies from source to source, there is a broad consensus that communities should consist of around 20-30 dwellings. The rationale for this figure is that more residents would undermine the ability to create strong neighbourly interactions, and fewer residents would risk the stability of the community if residents were to leave (Durrett 2009:85; Holtzman 2010:21; Williams 2005:199). The dwellings are similar to those in mainstream housing, allowing residents the ability to live privately if they wish to do so.

Cohousing communities all contain a range of collectively owned, shared facilities. Whilst many residential typologies contain practical amenities such as laundry rooms or bicycle storage, cohousing communities combine these with communal social spaces such as kitchens and dining rooms. Communal spaces are usually located within a 'common house'. This term can sometimes refer to a separate building which houses the communal spaces, although others use it generically to describe the cluster of social spaces regardless of whether it is a separate 'house' or not. Common facilities often included in common houses are a kitchen, dining room, children's playroom, activity spaces or libraries and gyms (Durrett 2009:28). The exact facilities contained within the common house are a key part of the design process, although communal dining is a ubiquitous, almost totemic feature in cohousing (Durrett 2009:151–55; Fromm 1991:22; Meltzer 2005:3; Williams 2005:212–13).

As much as the physical forms they take, cohousing groups are defined by their organisation structures. One of the key tenets of cohousing is that they are resident-led and managed, without external management bodies making decisions on behalf of the residents. Cohousing is usually initiated by the residents who will eventually live in the community although there are examples of speculatively developed cohousing in the USA (Williams 2008). Whilst cohousing can be seen as employing democratic principles of equality in decision making, many cohousing groups base their management structures on a system of consensus rather than a vote based democracy (Durrett 2009:19–25; Holtzman 2010:15; Williams 2005:202).

The resident-led development approach has been used to explain both the long development process and the high failure rate of cohousing groups. Although there is a lack of comprehensive data, it has been suggested that just 1 in 10 cohousing groups ever develop a physical community together (Crabtree 2016:160). Although development times vary, it is not uncommon to see communities with a development process that exceeds 10 years<sup>7</sup>. These challenges have been attributed both to the “... community-driven design and development processes...” that are employed by cohousers, which are exacerbated by lack of “...property development, architectural, project management or group facilitation skills” in many cohousing groups (Crabtree 2016:160). The challenges of developing cohousing are particularly pertinent in relation to older people’s cohousing, where a prolonged development process could account for a large portion the individuals remaining years.

### **Social aims - cohousing as ‘three waves’**

Whereas the spatial and organisational qualities of cohousing have remained consistent since the 1970s, the social aims of cohousing and the means through which it has been produced have changed considerably. The relationship

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, Older Women’s Cohousing in London, UK (OWCH 2016b), whose 18 year development process will be discussed later in this chapter.

between cohousing groups and the architect have altered significantly at different points in the development of cohousing.

Meltzer argues that cohousing can be understood as occurring in three waves, each with different motives and result: an idealistic first wave, a pragmatic second wave, and a third wave which combined elements of both previous waves. The concept of cohousing as occurring within waves was first established by Meltzer (2005), and has since become a key concept within the field of cohousing. It is often used to describe how the motives of cohousing groups have changed over time, and how these differences have affected people's experience of living in cohousing<sup>8</sup>.

The *first wave* emerged in Scandinavia in the 1970s and focused on the realisation of social goals through new residential communities. These were politically, socially and ethically motivated communities seeking to use cohousing as a means of generating social change in society, often in response to a critique of individualism. Issues that informed first wave cohousing include gender roles in society, alternative child raising philosophies, homelessness, challenges facing single parents and radical communitarian utopias (Meltzer 2005:7; Sargisson 2012:32).

The *second wave* developed in the 1980s and reinterpreted co-housing as a de-politicised and pragmatic way of achieving better neighbourly interactions (Brenton 2008:4; Durante 2011:311–12; Krokfors 2012:311). The second wave of cohousing emerged from the USA in the 1980s, notably due to the influence of architects Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant (Sargisson 2012:33–34). They revised the first wave Scandinavian model of cohousing to include a wider range of partners such as developers and facilitators and removed the ideological focus that some might find unpalatable, instead focusing on expanding the cohousing audience by concentrating on a universal desire to

---

<sup>8</sup> For examples of this, see Sargisson's work on the changing relationship between cohousing and utopia (2012)

have better neighbourly relations (Durante 2011:312; Durrett and McCamant 2011).

The *third wave* combines the positions of the previous two waves. The pragmatic approach developed in the second wave of cohousing remains, particularly the inclusion of developers and other social institutions as partners in the creation of cohousing. In addition to supporting neighbourliness between cohousers, the third wave attempts to realise broader social aims, such as those seen in the first wave. One of the common themes of third wave cohousing is providing a means of mutual support between residents. This is undertaken in response to the disintegration of existing support networks, both in terms of interpersonal support (extended families nearby, job security and stable neighbourhood populations) and institutional support such as the withdrawal of the welfare state 'safety-net'. The most prominent third wave cohousing is older people's cohousing (Brenton 2013). This seeks to enable older people to maintain well-being and self-determination by actively responding to changes in their life and community. This latest wave of cohousing is differentiated from other waves because it is built on civic commitment and a wider social activation on the part of the cohouser. This is manifest both within communities, where political and social issues from the first wave of cohousing are re-introduced, but also outside of the community through the conceptualisation of cohousing as a social movement, and the cohouser as both activist and advocate (Durante 2011). The third wave of cohousing is on-going, and thus the definitions of what constitutes a third wave community and how it is created is still emerging within the discourse.

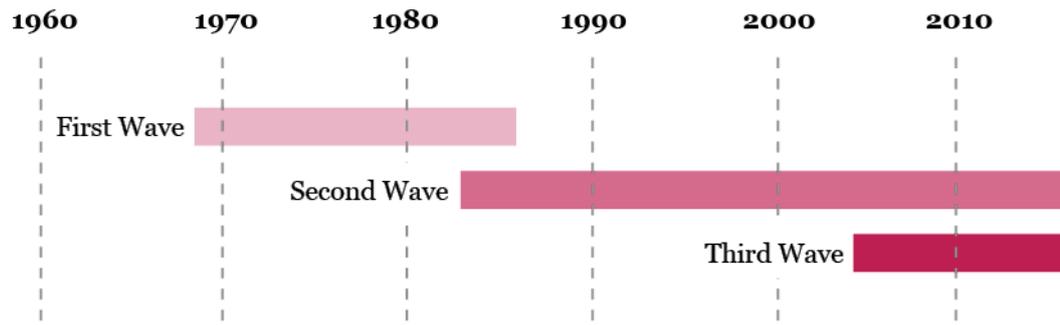


Figure 2: Timeline of the three waves of cohousing  
(Author's own)

Figure 2 shows the development timelines of the three waves. The second wave of cohousing has remained active as the third wave has grown, with both waves presenting different opportunities for emerging groups.

### **Cohousing and ‘participation’**

The conception of the three waves of cohousing has primarily been used to describe the changing social aims of cohousing, but this analysis has not extended to include how the role of the architect has changed in response to the transition between these waves. Durrett suggests that ‘participatory design’ is on the six components of cohousing, and goes as far as to argue that participatory design is the most important element of any cohousing community, and that “...no cohousing community has ever been built any other way” (2009:19–20).

The call for participatory design processes in cohousing is not without challenges. There are time and cost implications involved in employing these techniques (Scanlon and Arrigoitia 2015:111), and the change in membership of the cohousing group (both before and after the community is established) result in many resident living in a community that they did not help design. Despite this, participatory design is cited as an important way of bringing the cohousing group together, generating a sense of ownership and enabling the community to contribute to the design of their community to ensure it meets their needs and desires (Durrett and McCamant 2011:235).

Despite this, there is a lack of critical understanding about participation within the cohousing field beyond the notion that cohousers should be “involved” in the design process in some way (Williams 2005:201). This is a notable gap within the current cohousing discourse, as the role of the architect between the three waves is not consistent.

The lack of definition of participation within cohousing mirrors Till’s assertion that ‘participation’ is “...an unchallenged generic term...” that is too often used uncritically. He suggests that resident involvement in architecture is understood as a dialectic between participation or non-participation - a positive, democratic, bottom-up approach, or as a negative, authoritarian, top-down approach. He argues that this is too simplistic, and that within any participatory process there are “...degrees of involvement ranging from token participation to full control...” (Till 2005:25)

Till’s (2005) calls for more nuanced discussion about participation is echoed in this research. This chapter seeks to explore a critical analysis of the relationship between the architect and the cohouser within the three waves of cohousing. This is particularly important because the way that participation is interpreted has not been consistent in cohousing, and the three waves offer different understandings of the architect-cohouser relationship.

The architect-cohouser relationship can be described in three ways – the architect designing ‘**for**’ cohousers, ‘**with**’ cohousers, and ‘**from**’ cohousers. This understanding of architecture ‘for, with and from’ the user is based on Carole Pateman’s model from *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), which Till uses to describe the nuances within participatory architecture.

Designing ‘for’ the cohouser represents both non-participatory and pseudo-participatory practices. This is when the architect either acts autonomously of the cohouser, or includes them in a process in order to placate them. The purpose of this is to persuade the cohouser to agree to decisions that the

architect has already made on their behalf, which is done for the purpose of gaining legitimacy and “...creating a ‘feeling’ of participation...” (Till 2005:27).

Designing ‘with’ the cohouser represents what Pateman refers to as ‘partial participation (1970:71). In this approach, the architect works alongside cohousers in a way that empowers them to influence the design, but in a way that the architect ultimately controls. There is inequality in how decisions are made when designing ‘with’, as the architect defines the parameters of the relationship and thus what decisions are open to debate. Despite this, cohousers are able to make real contributions to the design of their communities through this approach.

Design ‘from’ the cohouser represents Till’s concept of ‘transformative participation’. In this, the process of participation is not predefined by the architect, but develops from the interactions they have with cohousers (Till 2005:32–33). The cohouser therefore has the ability not just to contribute to the design of the community, but also to define the relationship that emerges between themselves and the architect. This is not to say that both architect and cohouser have equal power within the relationship, but rather that the architect understands that forgoing their control over the process represents an opportunity to engage in situations that increase their capability to act, rather than a threaten their power (Till 2005:30).

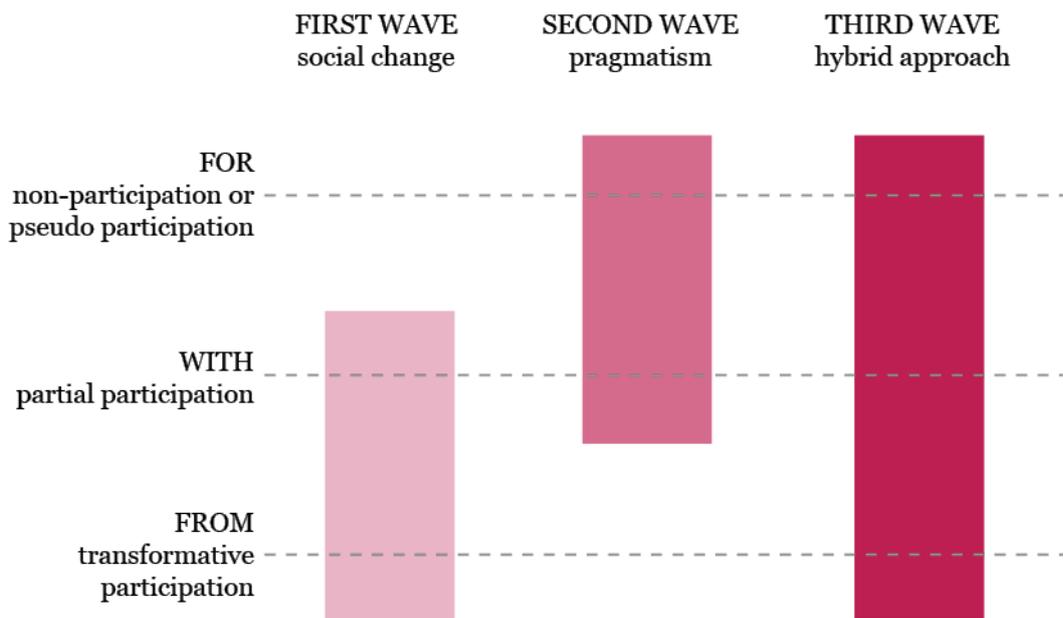


Figure 3: Architect-Cohouser relationship types within the three waves of cohousing (Author's own)

As Figure 3 shows, each of the three waves of cohousing do not conform strictly to just one of these relationship types. Even within a single community, the architect-cohouser relationship might take different forms at different times. Despite this, it is still possible to distinguish different relationships in each of the three waves. The first wave is primarily concerned with designing 'with and from', the second wave seeks to design 'for and with', and the emerging third wave is based on design 'for, with and from'. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to examining how the nature of participation between architect and cohouser has changed across the three waves through a series of case studies. These case studies were identified through academic literature, guides aimed at prospective cohousers and the self-published websites of architects and cohousing groups. The one exception to this was the case study of Loppukiri Cohousing, which was informed by conversations I had with the residents and their architect during a field trip in 2014. These case studies demonstrate how the forms of participatory design evolved in response to the conditions and aspirations that underpin each of the three waves, and suggest the potential roles for the architect in the emerging third wave of cohousing.

## 2.2 First Wave

A unique quality of the first wave cohousing is the prevalence of architects who started cohousing groups for themselves to live in, as opposed to operating as a sub-contracted design professional. This architect-client-user is not unique, as there is a long history of architects building their own homes, but to do so in a collaborative, democratic setting requires the architect to be more than a building designer. The role of the architect in first wave cohousing can be summarised as having the role of the initiator, spatial negotiator and creative enabler.

### Architect as initiator

Two very different examples of the architect as a project initiator can be seen in the Swedish Kollektivhuser model, and in the *Sættedammen* and *Skråplanet* communities, two early cohousing schemes in Denmark with a partially shared development process. Both of these were initiated through collaboration between architects and social activists, but each takes a significantly different approach.

Kollektivhuser is an early precursor to cohousing where the architect, working 'with' others, created a speculative communal housing development. Whilst the architect here did not work with the eventual residents, Kollektivhuser demonstrates how cohousing can increase a citizen's capability to act through habitation within a community. In this example, the architect partnered with a sociologist to create a community in response to a critique they formed around the individualised society. Based on this, they created a community that provided services and situations in which the residents were able to act in ways that would not be possible in the traditional family home (Vestbro and Horelli 2012:322–25).

Sættedammen and Skråplanet both demonstrate a more direct relationship between architect and eventual residents, in which the design process emerged 'from' the group (including the architect), rather than through a process imposed on the cohousers by the architect. These examples show how a social

vision could be realised through the creation of a new community, and demonstrate how the first wave of cohousing enabled architects to contribute to this social definition through their propositional and spatial skills (Fromm 1991:6–16).

### *Kollektivhuser - John Ericssonsgatan 6*

Kollektivhuser was a niche housing concept developed in Sweden in the 1930s and is regarded by some as a precursor to the contemporary model of cohousing (Fromm 1991:73). The concept was created by architect Sven Markelius and social scientist Alva Myrdal as a response to the limited roles of women in society due to the burdens of domestic life<sup>9</sup>. Myrdal was critical of individualism, which she suggested manifested itself as “...twenty families each in their own apartment cook their own meat-balls” (Myrdal 1932 as cited in Vestbro 2008:3). To overcome this, Markelius and Myrdal sought to create a form of collective living in which cooking, cleaning, laundry and childcare were centralised and undertaken by paid workers – the ‘family hotel’. The first kollektivhuser, *John Ericssonsgatan 6*, was built in 1935 in Stockholm and shares many spatial characteristics with contemporary cohousing. There were 54 self-contained apartments with shared facilities, but unlike contemporary cohousing, these facilities were run as private businesses rather than communally. John Ericssonsgatan 6 featured a restaurant, shop and kindergarten, and the building featured dumb-waiters so that each household could order food as they arrived home and it would be delivered directly to their apartment. The cost of these services was spread between 54 residencies and thus was affordable to middle-class clientele (Fromm 1991:73–74; Vestbro and Horelli 2012:322–25).

Markelius’ role as the architect within the creation of Kollektivhuser is different from the majority of cohousing groups that came later. In John Ericssonsgatan 6, the eventual residents of his community were customers rather than

---

<sup>9</sup> Markelius and Myrdal would go on to have illustrious careers. Markelius would later win the RIBA gold medal in 1962, while Myrdal won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 for her work in nuclear disarmament.

collaborators and had no input into what the community would be. The one resident who Markelius did interact with was himself, as he planned to live in John Ericssonsgatan 6 once it was completed. Markelius' interactions with Myrdal, on the other hand, demonstrates one of the key qualities of the first wave of cohousing - the mutual empowerment of individuals through their interactions. The collaboration enabled them both to propose and offer an affordable solution to a socially constructed housing crisis, a societal orthodoxy that both wished to challenge.



Figure 4: Exterior of John Ericssonsgatan 6  
(Image: Ellgaard 2010)



Figure 5: The restaurant and dining room of John Ericssonsgatan 6 (date unknown)

(Image: “Restaurant at John Ericssonsgatan 6” n.d.)

While the kollektivhuser informed the spatial characteristics of cohousing, it was a later, unintended change to Markelius’ community model that generated an additional characteristic that has been adopted by later waves of cohousing – enabling people to work together to realise their own visions. Other developers copied Markelius’ model of the ‘family hotel’, and a number of them were opened in Sweden the 1940s and 50s. The Hasselby Family Hotel was one of the last family hotels to be built, opening in the mid-1950s and featuring 328 apartments. In the 1960s, the Hasselby Family Hotel began to attract younger, more politically motivated residents seeking alternative lifestyles. These residents formed a tenants’ association objecting to rules set by the management team and demanded a greater say in the decision-making, eventually taking over the running for some services from the management

companies (Fromm 1991:73–74; Vestbro 2008:4–6; Vestbro and Horelli 2012:322–25). This shift from managed accommodation to self-management was important in the future definition of cohousing. Spatially, ‘family hotels’ shared many qualities with contemporary cohousing, but it was only when residents took control of decision making that they could fulfil their desired vision of social co-operation.

### *Sættedammen and Skråplanet*

Sættedammen and Skråplanet, both in Denmark, are two examples of early cohousing communities that share a similar origin to the Kollektivhuser approach. They both emerged from a single group, drawn together by two newspaper articles that critiqued individualisation and the roles of women in society. Bodil Graae, a journalist, wrote “Children Should Have One Hundred Parents” in 1967, which examined expectations of childcare in the single-family home. In 1968 architect Jan Gudmand-Hoyer wrote “The Missing Link between Utopia and the Dated One-Family Houses”, which identified similar themes to Graae - the limits of individualism in society and how these could be overcome through communal endeavour. His position was that a different society based on communalism needed to be created, and cohousing was the first step “...along the road to a better world, a transformed society.” (Sargisson 2012:32). As a result of these articles, Gudmand-Hoyer and Graae formed a group of 50 families who sought to develop a cohousing community (Durrett and McCamant 2011:40–41).

The group would eventually split into two due to different ideas about how children should be looked after within the community, with each adopting a different relationship with their architect. Gudmand-Hoyer went with the group who later became Skråplanet, with himself taking on the role of the group's architect. This provided the opportunity for Gudmand-Hoyer to use his architectural knowledge to generate more than just built form, but instead a shared vision for the community through the interactions between architect and cohouser at an early, project-definiton phase.

Graae’s group, who would later create a community called Sættedammen, adopted a more traditional approach to development by employing an architect in a building design capacity. Significantly, the Sættedammen group took the decision to employ an architect at an early stage of their development, before the group had developed a robust design brief. Architects Theo Bjerg and Palle Dyreborgs worked with the group to undertake feasibility studies on potential sites, which influenced their financial model and how they recruited members (Bendixen et al. 1997:6–7) As a result, the interactions between the architects and the Sættedammen residents were not limited to creating form or aesthetics, but the wider definition what the community were trying to achieve and how they could do so spatially.

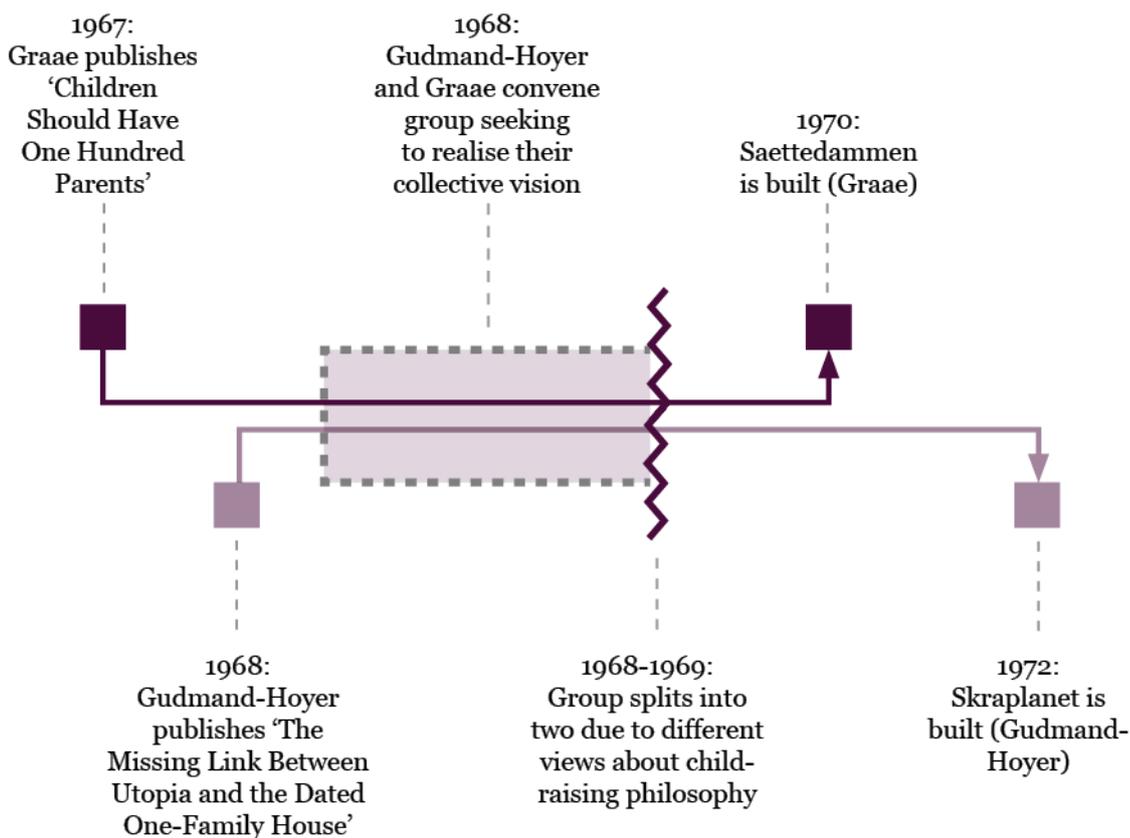


Figure 6: Diagram of Sættedammen and Skråplanet development chronology (Author’s own)

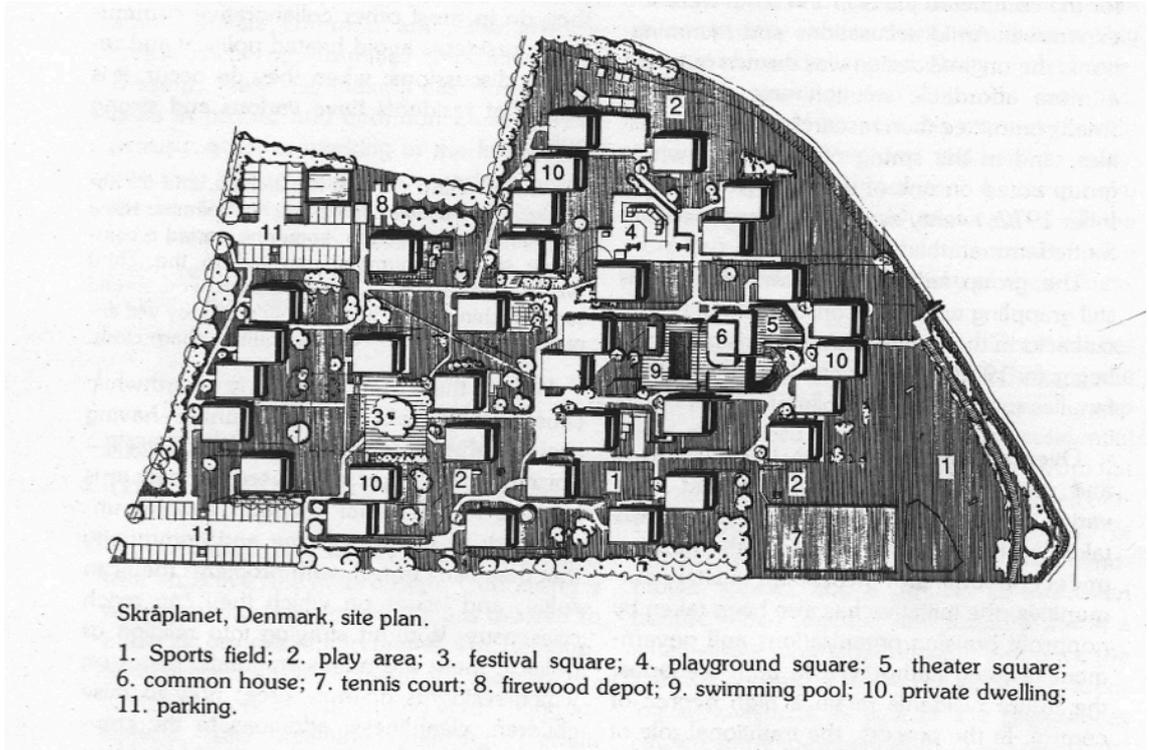


Figure 7: Skråplanet Cohousing site plan  
(Fromm 1991:16)

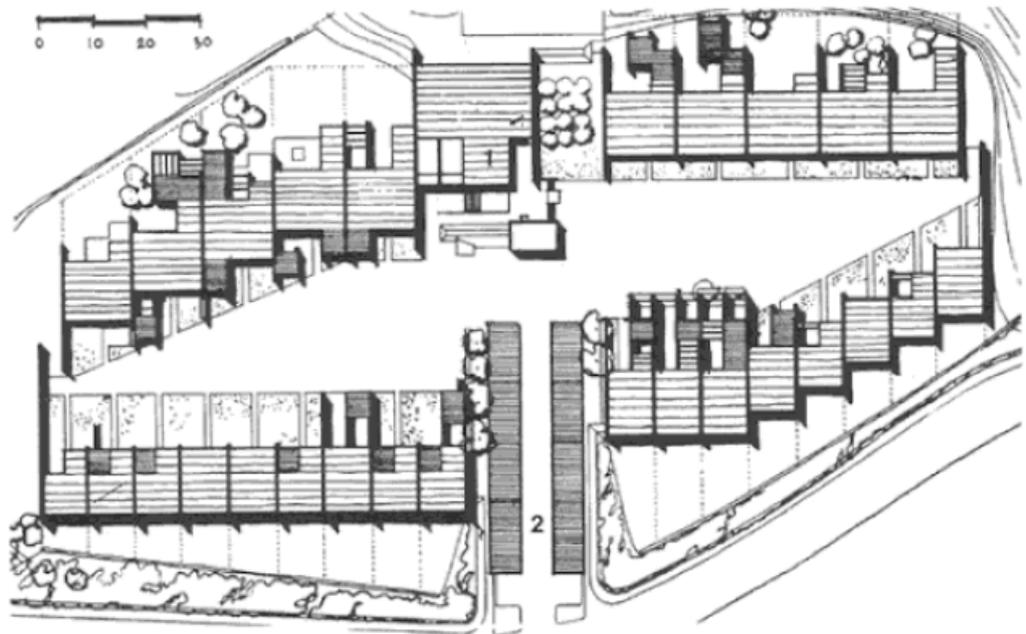


Figure 8: Sættedammen Cohousing site plan  
(Durrett and McCamant 2011:40)



Figure 9: Sættedammen Cohousing in Hillerød, Denmark  
(“Shared meal at Saettedammen” n.d.)



Figure 10: Skråplanet Cohousing in Værlose, Denmark  
(Image: Mason 1999)

### **Architect as spatial negotiator**

The first wave cohousing communities of Skråplanet and Sættedammen demonstrate how the different desires of individuals are negotiated through cohousing. Whilst members of the Gudmand-Hoyer/Graae group were drawn together by a shared social vision of collectivism and a desire to challenge the 'individual house' orthodoxy, their ideas about how this could be realised differed. In communicating these different ideas, the group were able to begin a process of negotiation through which the community could be formed.

The Gudmand-Hoyer/Graae group held debates and discussions that explored what people wanted to achieve through cohousing and produced a questionnaire to identify the differing needs of the group (Bendixen et al. 1997:6). This process identified a fundamental difference between members of the group, which led to the group splitting into two separate communities, although they continued to support each other through the development process (Fromm 1991:15). The point of conflict was Graae's child raising pedagogy, which envisioned a community "...where the adults would take care of all the children and where children could move freely and be welcome at any of the homes." (Fromm 1991:14). Whilst some agreed with this vision others, including Gudmand-Hoyer, did not. In the end, the group felt unable to negotiate this vision into a single design. Families who agreed with Graae's vision created the Sættedammen community, whereas Gudmand-Hoyer and others who disagreed formed the Skråplanet community.

Whilst this split might appear to be a failure of negotiation, it was necessary to identify and make explicit the differences with the group so that people could make informed decisions. The group could have decided to opt for the status quo and reject Graae's idea, but for half the residents this compromise would have limited their capability to raise their children as they saw fit. This demonstrates the primacy of the social vision in first wave cohousing – both groups were willing to break apart from each other because they did not see a

way of accommodating the differences between members on such a fundamental issue.

The discussion regarding child-raising philosophy was not conceptual, but inherently spatial. One of the key manifestations proposed by Graae was the ability for children to move freely around the site, a suggestion that comes with a series of social and spatial implications for how the community would operate. Although Gudmand-Hoyer's role within these discussion is not documented, the presence of an architect during this early, project defining stage made it possible for these issues to be made explicit and discussed spatially. This is only possible because he was part of the group's interactions at this early project defining stage, long before most groups would consider employing an architect.

Both Skråplanet and Sættedammen demonstrate how first wave cohousing groups negotiated the social and political desires of residents, and how these negotiations were enabled through their interactions with architects. Whilst these communities focused on realising new forms of child raising, other first wave cohousing communities were motivated by other social concerns, such as providing support for the homeless, single parents and low-income students (Meltzer 2005:7).

### **Creativity through interactions**

Sættedammen and Skråplanet are examples of the design coming from both the cohousers and the architect, rather than through a process controlled by the architect alone. This was necessary because the vision that the groups sought did not previously exist in society, and thus needed to be generated from within the community itself. By collaborating in a non-hierarchical manner, members of the groups were able to build on the expertise and ideas that others in the group held, and thus generate creative, innovative ideas that they could not have realised alone.

By conceptualising cohousing as a means of challenging societal orthodoxies, there is a propositional focus within the first wave of cohousing that requires

architects and citizens to define and respond to new problems, rather than conform to predetermined models or solutions. This creativity was central to first wave cohousing from the outset because the social movement that underpinned these communities lacked forms of expression, and thus placed an onus on the followers of these movements to create them for themselves. This led to new forms of relationship between cohousers and architects (and cohouser-architects like Gudmand-Hoyer), because it made these more embedded forms of collaboration necessary for realising these social visions.

Sættedammen demonstrates how a first wave cohousing community is able to act creatively through interactions between cohousers and other agents, such as architects. The initial discussions within the group had identified a number of positions the group wished to take, including the realisation of Graae's child raising pedagogy and the creation of a community that was inclusive of people with different incomes. Before the group had created a brief, they decided to employ architects Bjerg and Dyreborgs to support them in embedding these ideas into their community.

The group recognised that some members were wealthier than others and desired larger properties. This concern was incompatible with other needs of the group, such as a need to standardise the properties to make them affordable. By being part of this discussion, Bjerg and Dyredorg proposed a modular design that allowed adaptability and expansion. A single house plan was built for all 27 dwellings at Sættedammen, but properties were easily adaptable and there were opportunities for residents to extend their dwellings if they saw fit. Many families built extensions, terraces and pergolas shortly after construction was completed (Bjerg in Bendixen et al. 1997:15).

Had the Sættedammen group not engaged with their architect at this stage, it is possible that the group would have made a decision regarding dwelling size and costs that excluded either those with less money or those who desired a larger property. Instead, the architects were able to be part of the discourse within the group and identify potential creative solutions as they arose. If the architects

had been employed in a more traditional role of building designer, opportunities to propose such innovations would have been limited.

A desire for social change in response to societal orthodoxies such as individualisation and familial roles can be seen as an important determinant of first wave cohousing. Both Markelius and Gudmand-Hoyer were driven by a critique of society, and thus generating an alternative vision required them to expand beyond the role of the traditional architect. The challenge for other cohousing groups was that this approach was reliant on an architect being part of their group. On a logistical level, both Markelius and Gudmand-Hoyer were able to dedicate time to these projects because they wanted to live there themselves. Sættedammen had to employ their architects as paid consultants and thus were more limited in their opportunities to interact with them. For cohousing to grow, an increasingly pragmatic approach based on paid architectural labour had to emerge. The second wave of cohousing, developed in the 1980s, built upon this pragmatic view of the architect's role to legitimise the cohousing as a viable housing option, at the expense of the radical social expression enabled within the first wave.

### **2.3 Second Wave**

The second wave of cohousing can be characterised by a conscious shift to make the model more viable, although this necessitated a change in emphasis from cohousing as a process, into cohousing as a product. The negotiation and radicalism of the first wave was viewed as incompatible with the financial viability of cohousing development, leading to a shift towards a more standardised model based on universal desires (good neighbourly bonds, supportive communities) rather than the social and ethical decisions that informed the first wave. This enabled architects to undertake design 'for' and 'with' the cohousers, thus avoiding the time consuming, embedded processes seen in the first wave.

This approach reduced the barriers to cohousing development and made it viable for professionals, such as architects, to work with cohousing groups commercially. A product of this was the creation of two new roles – the architect as a project facilitator, and as a participatory building designer.

### **The architect's role in de-politicising cohousing**

Second wave cohousing rejects the social and political aims of first wave cohousing in favour of greater accessibility, which is realised through the commercialisation of cohousing as a marketable experience – an “...old-fashioned neighbourhood that supports friendly cooperation, socialization, and mutual support” (Durrett 2009:5). The emergence of developer-driven cohousing in the second wave both expanded the opportunities for people's interest in cohousing, but created a situation whereby innovation presented a financial risk to the developer.

Durrett and McCamant are credited with bringing the cohousing model to the US in the 1980s and are the main protagonists of the second wave movement. They conceptualise cohousing as promoting good neighbourly relations, an uncontentious goal, in favour of any discussion of wider social, ethical or political positions taken by the group (Brenton 2008:4; Williams 2005:202). The focus of the second wave is not an attempt to realise utopian visions of a better society, but a more modest goal of creating neighbourly communities that are “...socially cohesive and mutually supportive (Meltzer 2005:2–3). Whilst first wave cohousing groups developed their ideas through the discussion of their utopian visions, the social aims of second wave cohousing were largely predetermined.

The result is a reduction of contingency from the development process. Rather than an opportunity for individuals to determine their community based on their social ideals, the second wave presents the individual with a more limited model of neighbourliness and sharing. This standardisation of the social aims of cohousing in turn promotes a single model of design thinking grounded in enabling neighbourly interactions (Durrett 2009:22–23; Fromm 1991:12;

Williams 2005:212–13). Examples of this include the positioning of parking on the edge of a cohousing site and creating communal mailboxes as a means of promoting informal interactions between residents. In addition, the facilitator role set out by Durrett and McCamant also enables the removal of contingency from the design process by guiding them through the process in a structured way.

The changes from the first wave made it easier for cohousing groups to establish and progress their development, but make it necessary for architects to increasingly work 'for' cohousers. A cohousing industry of developers and consultants emerged, able to support cohousing groups to become established and causing a boom in cohousing in the US during the 1980s and 1990s. These new professionals require stability to make their own employment viable, and the inflexible second wave cohousing approach mitigated against potential contingent elements of the development process, such as residents disagreeing about the purpose of their community.

Second wave cohousing creates a model that is relatively inflexible, but this can be seen as having positive and negative effects on the cohouser and the architect's agency. By taking this pragmatic approach, the second wave enables an expansion of cohousing production, but also limited opportunities to realise wider social goals.

The architect must make similar compromises. For Durrett and McCamant, the commercialisation of cohousing allows them to act as non-resident professionals, and thus support many communities to become established. The conflict and instability seen in the first wave, such as the split between Skråplanet and Sættedammen, would make their practices financially unviable. The pragmatic approach taken in second wave cohousing is to limit the parameters of discussion within the participatory design process. This enables the architect to contribute to cohousing because it makes it financially viable, but in doing so undermines the qualities of cohousing that make it interesting. By insisting that cohousing is non-ideological, and thus not concerned with

social change, some have argued that proponents of the second wave are “...aligned with the dominant (liberal-capitalist) ideology, and seeks local and limited change, through the establishment of cohousing communities.” (Sargisson 2012:37). By removing the cohouser from the self-determination of their vision, cohousing undermines the radical potential that comes with a resident-led approach.

### **Architect as facilitator and/or designer**

The adversity to contingency within second wave cohousing influenced how the architect was deployed. Durrett and McCamant proposed two professionals within the development of a cohousing community – a facilitator and an architect. The facilitator guides cohousing groups through the development process, including recruitment, team-building, business planning and engaging with professionals. The architect’s role is defined as a building designer the cohousers will inhabit, which is undertaken through a participatory process. These are roles that Durrett and McCamant took on as practitioners in the US, often both acting as the facilitator and architect on the same project. Whilst the dual role of facilitator and architect theoretically creates opportunities for cohousing groups to work with architects from an early stage, Durrett and McCamant’s methodology treats these roles as distinct roles whose tasks do not overlap. As a result, Durrett and McCamant’s model prevents the exploration of spatial concerns during the pre-design stage of development, limiting the potential for contingency to enter the development process.

The cohousing consultant is tasked with supporting emerging cohousing groups, primarily by supporting citizens to decide whether cohousing is suitable for them. The purpose of the facilitator is to streamline the cohousing development process, making the development of cohousing more predictable and stable. This makes it possible for a wide range of parties, such as developers, mortgage lenders and professionals, to contribute to the creation of cohousing with less risk of cost overruns or project cancellation. The cohousing approach set out by Durrett and McCamant proposes a developer-led model of cohousing, with the

facilitator acting both on behalf of the residents and the cohousing development company.

Durrett and McCamant outline the role of the cohousing consultant or facilitator in a series of books aimed at prospective cohousing groups (Durrett 2009; Durrett and McCamant 2011). They propose a series of workshops for newly formed cohousing groups covering a range of topics. Each workshop covers a theme, such as 'Realities of getting older', 'Embracing risk' and 'Philosophy, spirituality and mortality', in which the facilitator leads a discussion and the group start to develop their shared vision (Durrett 2009:102–3). This is an example of the architect working 'with' cohousers, as Durrett designed the process that the group undertake, but the prospective cohousers can contribute within these parameters that Durrett sets.

Durrett states that these early discussions led by the facilitator should take place on a separate, parallel work-stream to the architectural development process, which is led by a cohousing developer and/or project manager (Durrett 2009:93). Although the architect later uses various forms of participation to include the cohousers in the design of their community, they do so based on the site, budget and parameters already set by the development work-stream. In splitting the role of the designer and the facilitator, the interactions that the facilitator has at the early stages provide little means of affecting how the cohousing community is created. This shows how the architect, alongside other professionals, also works 'for' the cohousers. Durrett rationalises this by arguing that, "...experienced professionals who know what they are doing can work and act more quickly and get better results." (Durrett 2009:86)

Durrett interprets the architect primarily as a building designer who converts "...theoretical plans into concrete reality". The architect is tasked with producing "... the actual drawings, balancing the desires and needs of the group, the characteristics of the site, building codes and the project's budget to create a complete plan for the community." (Durrett 2009:137). Whilst Durrett advocates designing 'for' cohousers in the early stages of development, he also

argues that there is value in designing 'with' cohousers during later stages. He calls for a participatory approach to design with high levels of involvement from the cohousers, although argues that this is "...cohousing's greatest asset and its most limiting factor", mainly due to the labour intensive nature of this approach (Durrett 2009:139). In response, he proposes a short series of workshops focused on master-planning, common house design, residential unit design and a 'design closure workshop' where the community agree to the design prior to planning approval. He argues that a good architect will educate the group to enable them to make better decisions and challenge the group's decisions in a way which improves the design without imposing their ideas on others (Durrett 2009:146). This approach to participation offers limited opportunity for cohousers to affect social, political and ethical qualities of the community, but does maintain their ability to inform the building placement and aesthetic design within an efficient, streamlined process.

Whilst it would seem beneficial for the facilitator and designer roles to be intertwined, this would undermine the innovation of Durrett and McCamant's approach – the pragmatic removal of contingency from the development process. Their model balances a reduction in the parameters that cohousers can affect whilst still generating opportunities of cohousers to develop a sense of ownership. For Durrett and McCamant it is this innovation that increases their capability to act, legitimising their expanded model of architectural practice by demonstrating that cohousing is commercially viable.

### **Architect as social design expert**

The challenge facing the second wave architect is balancing a call for participatory methods with the need to reduce the contingency that is inherent in this process. In response to this, the second wave places a great emphasis on overcoming the 'problem' of social interaction through design. By showing expertise in designing communities that promote neighbourly interactions, the architect demonstrates a rationale for maintaining an element of design autonomy, reducing the time and cost implications involved in participatory processes.

The architect's role as an expert in designing 'socially enabling' buildings has become an important element of the cohousing research field. Based on post-occupancy case studies, Fromm developed a spatial manifesto for cohousing which linked physical form to social interaction, in which the goal of the architect in cohousing is "...to bring residents in daily contact with each other." He cites design elements such as the location of car parks on the edge of sites and soft edges between houses and gardens are important in aiding social interaction, whilst equally arguing that designs need to be tailored to specific requirements of any group (Fromm 1991:12–14). The specificity of this design guidance varies – Durrett goes as far as to argue that porches should be "...atleast seven feet deep and nine feet wide" and social 'gathering nodes' such as picnic tables shared "...with every five to nine houses" (Durrett 2009:27).

Although the validity of these design criteria and their applicability in diverse contexts has been contested (Williams 2005:222–24), architects have been able to legitimise and commodify the value of their knowledge in enabling social interactions to take place. The development of a model for cohousing design, based on the social enabling design criteria that has emerged within the field, provides the architect with a means of retaining control over the design process, and thus mitigating against any contingency.

The focus of the architect within second wave cohousing is the realisation of a better building, rather than seeking ways to question what the building is trying to achieve. As a result, the architect undertakes in a much lower level of engagement than seen the first wave, thus increasing the viability of the architect as a paid professional in the cohousing process. The negative consequence of this is, however, a lack of opportunities for the architect and cohouser to engage with social, political or ethical consideration outside of the accepted, pragmatic second wave cohousing model. This limitation provides the basis of third wave cohousing, a wave that attempts to combine both the radical and pragmatist positions of the first and second wave of cohousing.

## 2.4 Third Wave

The defining characteristic of the third wave of cohousing is the return of social, political and ethical issues beyond the focus on ‘neighbourliness’ that underpinned the second wave of cohousing. Key examples of this are cohousing communities driven by affordability, environmentalism, and cohort specific groups such as older people within both mixed age communities and age-specific groupings. Despite this, the need for the cohousing model to be financially efficient, pragmatic and thus acceptable to a wide range of supportive institutions remains a key determinant of the third wave. The mixture of social aims and a pragmatist approach has enabled new partners to engage in cohousing, such as housing associations and charitable trusts. This has led to new opportunities for innovation, and an expansion of what cohousing is able to achieve and who is able to create it.

The third wave of cohousing is still emerging, and there currently lacks a coherent understanding of the architect’s role within it. Within the third wave, it is possible to see the architect designing ‘for’, ‘with’ and ‘from’ the cohousers they work with, sometimes all within the same project. In some cases, this has seen the architect’s role reduced further into a purely building design role (‘for’), whereas other examples demonstrate how the arrival of new development partners has allowed the architect to develop new forms of practice (‘with’ and ‘from’). The approaches developed by architects such as Durrett and McCamant remain key resources within the field, with Durrett even producing a publication about ‘senior cohousing’ that calls for a continuation of the approach he set out in the second wave (Durrett 2009). The third wave has also seen some alternative understandings of the architect’s role in cohousing, challenging some of the positions set out by Durrett. In some situations this has seen the architect’s role interpreted as a building designer, a position put forward by *‘The Cohousing Toolkit’* produced by the UK Cohousing Network (2012). In others, the architect’s role is expanded in response to the conditions of practice, with examples of the architect acting as a negotiator between cohousers and developers (OWCH 2016c) and the architect working with future residents as a co-investigator (Loppukiri

Cohousing n.d.). This section will explore the opportunities and constraints that these three roles present for the architect in third wave cohousing.

### **Architect as building designer**

Despite the increased interest in using cohousing as a medium for social change, some examples of third wave cohousing demonstrate an increasingly limited role for the architect. Unlike the first wave of cohousing, in which architect were embedded within the development process, the third wave of cohousing sees a divergence in how groups are supported. Whilst the arrival of housing associations and charities provide financial backing to some new groups, others are provided with little support. For these groups without support, the only opportunity they have is to undertake a DIY approach. Enabled by the emergence of specialist guides and literature aimed at prospective cohouser and limited by a lack of financial backing, many third wave cohousing groups choose to act as their own facilitators. For these groups, employing an architect in the early development stages is unviable. This is compounded by the projections of the architect within these guides as a profession who just designs buildings. As a result, emerging cohousing groups can often see no value in employing them outside of a traditional building design contract.

The limited possibilities of architect-cohouser collaboration in the third wave of cohousing can be seen in *'The Cohousing Toolkit'* (2012) produced by the UK Cohousing Network. The toolkit provides a development methodology for cohousing aimed at prospective cohousing groups in the UK, with the cohousers taking on the role of the facilitator themselves. Although the toolkit does mention 'senior' cohousing as an option for older people seeking to live in cohousing (UK Cohousing Network 2012:4), the guide does not respond to the specific challenges that older people's cohousing groups face in the development process. The approach takes a DIY perspective on cohousing, asking that cohousers determine by themselves the majority of aspects of their community, and later employ an architect to produce a building based on this vision. The Cohousing Toolkit can be seen as a response to the lack of professionals like

Durrett who can support emerging groups, necessitating a DIY approach to cohousing during the initial development phases.

The Cohousing Toolkit suggests that an architect should only be employed at the very end of a development process. Cohousers are advised to develop their project plan together, undertaking research into areas such as “...sustainable design, involving a social landlord, what works in the common house, environmentally sustainable building materials, different forms of tenure, [and] consensus decision making.” (UK Cohousing Network 2012:8). This is used to develop a manifesto of their social goals and a list of design elements that they desire in their community. It is also recommended that cohousers research the civic and political context of their development. The toolkit suggests the need to “...understand local planning priorities, processes and issues” (UK Cohousing Network 2012:8), as well as government policy and possible grant subsidies which might influence their progress or direction. After this, it advises that cohousing groups develop a business plan including “The likely costs of the development and the parameters for pricing the houses.” (UK Cohousing Network 2012:14) In order to complete the business plan, the toolkit advises that cohousers should at this stage find a suitable plot of land, investigate local planning frameworks and speak to planning officers or councillors to discuss their plans. It also suggests that groups might want to employ a planning consultant and land agent at this stage to assist them (UK Cohousing Network 2012:15–17). It is only after these steps that the toolkit argues for the architect be employed, noting that they are “...likely to be your primary professional” in the design and construction phases (UK Cohousing Network 2012:17–18). As the cohousing groups should have already researched building materials, made a brief, set out the cost of their scheme, identified a site and investigated local planning constraints, the architect’s role is limited to the design of the building that the cohousers will later inhabit. This is limiting for both the cohousers and the eventual architect they would employ. It places the onus on the cohousers to make a series of decisions without an understanding of the spatial implications they could generate, or the options different options available to them based on their collective aims and values.

The toolkit guidance for employing an architect sets out a proposed business relationship, rather than a collaborative design relationship. It is the responsibility of the group to "Make sure your professionals understand the nature of the project" within a commissioning brief (UK Cohousing Network 2012:17). The toolkit urges cohousing groups to "Train your group to understand how to behave as a 'client'" (UK Cohousing Network 2012:18). This is achieved by appointing a cohouser to be the single link between the cohousers and the architect through which all communication must be made, and informing the architect about the group's decision-making protocols and the need to provide ample notice for the groups to make decisions. Whilst the toolkit notes that the architect-client relationship needs to be considered a partnership based on trust and respect, it also suggests that cohousers need to be "...hard headed" in their dealing with architects, and to "Keep a close eye on contracts, budgets and time" (UK Cohousing Network 2012:18).

The architect-cohouser relationship is understood as oppositional, with participatory design a means of ensuring that the architect is not deviating from the wishes of the cohousers. It assumes that the architect is seeking to act 'for' the cohousers, but that the architect's power can be mediated and reduced by instead designing 'with' the cohousers. Because their interactions are based solely on the production of architectural design, there is an expertise imbalance between the knowledgeable architect and novice cohouser. Cohousers seek to increase their knowledge about architecture as a means of understanding and critiquing the architect's decisions, rather than interacting in a way that enables mutual empowerment. An example of this is *Older Women's Cohousing* (OWCH) in High Barnet, whose membership is limited to women over the age of 50. They reflect that their relationship with an architect was "...something of a learning curve for all concerned" because the group were unaccustomed to the "...the technical language and conventions of the professionals". They also noted that this was challenging for the architect because they demanded more communication and involvement than most other clients (OWCH 2016c).

### **Architect as enabler and mediator**

The diversity of contexts and differing support for third wave cohousing groups means that the interpretation of the architect solely as a building designer is not a universally held position. The opportunity to work with a wider range of partners such as housing associations and charities provides both the support to engage with professionals at an earlier stage of development, and an additional set of constraints that cohousers must navigate. OWCH demonstrate how institutional support can aid an emerging cohousing group, but equally the limits that this support can offer within the wider development constraints that cohousers face.

The OWCH group is founded on principles of equality, companionship and mutual support, with the aim of developing a community that allows the residents to remain self-reliant as they grow older. Whilst the architect within the OWCH development was primarily concerned with the formal and aesthetic design of the community, they had a secondary role of negotiating the views of the OWCH members with those of other partners such as financiers and developers.

OWCH combine their social vision for an empowering community of older women with a pragmatic partnership with a development partner. The group worked with Hanover Housing Association, who has acted as their developer and provided a bridging loan for their community. They also forged a relationship with 'Housing for Women', a social housing association who would act as the landlord for social rental dwellings that were included in the community (Brenton 2011:121; OWCH 2016a; Stevens 2013:9). The group started in 1998, after attending a presentation about cohousing from academic Maria Brenton. Rather than using a DIY approach to development, the OWCH group sought to obtain the support of charities and housing organisations who could help them as they progressed. They quickly established a management board consisting of themselves, the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and Housing for Women Housing Association, and receive funding for Brenton (a social scientist

and housing consultant, rather than an architect) to work with the group and support their development.

Despite the support from Brenton and others, the group's development process was long and the group only moved into their community in 2016 after 18 years of development (OWCH 2016b). The group cited the challenges they faced as older women as a reason for this slow development, arguing that "Ageism and a dominant culture of paternalism towards the aged has also played its part in the long journey travelled by the OWCH project"(OWCH 2016d). This demonstrates the limits of the support that any expert can provide to a cohousing group in the face of structural barriers to development, particularly in urban locations where there is great competition from better resourced private developers. Eventually, the management board formed a partnership with Hanover Housing Association, who supported the group in purchasing a site in Barnet and provided development finances and a bridging loan for the group.

Through financial support from Hanover, the group had secured a site and could begin their relationship with an architect. The group chose to work with Pollard Thomas Edwards architects (PTEa). Hanover identified suitable architectural firms from their own expertise, but made the selection based on criteria developed by the members of the OWCH group. PTEa and OWCH developed a collaborative design relationship based on the creation of the physical community, such as "...the overall site layout; the extent and role of the communal areas; the layout of the homes; and landscaping and materials" (Pollard Thomas Edwards 2016). This approach is similar to that developed in the second wave of cohousing, where the architect's role is primarily to negotiate the aesthetic tastes of individuals within the community. The architects note that "We started from the premise that the members of OWCH should determine the character and layout of the project so far as was compatible with practical and planning requirements" (Pollard Thomas Edwards 2016).

PTEa not only negotiated the needs of OWCH residents into a single design but also negotiated the needs of the OWCH group with those of their developer Hanover Housing Association. Conscious that there was a risk that the OWCH group could fold at any point, Hanover made it a condition of their partnership that the design of the scheme enabled the sale of the properties as individual dwellings. As a result of this, the OWCH community takes a form that is “...beautiful and suited to community living but not particularly radical.” (Arrigoitia and Scanlon 2015:29)



Figure 11: Older Women's Cohousing in Barnet, London  
(Image: Pollard Thomas Edwards 2016)

The OWCH project demonstrates how the social intent of a cohousing group can be married to a pragmatic development process, but in doing so also identifies the limits of this approach. The OWCH members' participation in the architectonic and aesthetic design of their community is more than the vast majority of residents are able to achieve, but it also under-represents the radical

basis of the group. The second wave of cohousing adopted a conservative conception of the architect as a form designer who would design 'for' and 'with' cohousers, but this is mirrored by the limited opportunities for cohousing to deviate from the model of a de-politicised 'neighbourly' community, a model necessary for the financial viability of second wave cohousing. For OWCH, the adoption of a conservative conception of the architect is more limited, as it creates a disconnect between the aims of the group and how it is realised in space. Cohousing was seen as a response to ageism, paternalism and social injustice by the OWCH group, but this is not manifest in the community as it is practised in space. This undermines both the architect's agency to negotiate the ideas of the cohousers in space, and the cohousers ability to accommodate different visions within the same community. This is not a critique of the OWCH group or any other third wave cohousing groups, but rather a consequence of how the architect is understood within the fields of cohousing.

The architect here contributed an important role in mediating between two clients – the cohousers and the housing association, but was equally limited to achieving this through the act of building design. Despite this, the limited scope of architect-cohouser interactions in the project led to the creation of fairly generic residential environments, rather than something that explores how the social values of the group could be promoted or manifest in space. Realising this would require the architect-cohouser relationship to embrace design emerging 'from' the group, rather than relying on the architect working 'for' or 'with' the cohousers, much like early examples seen in first wave cohousing. An example of this can be seen in the Loppukiri community in Helsinki, Finland, whose relationship to their architect was grounded in a mutual co-investigation at the early stages of their development process.

### **Architect as co-investigator**

The adoption of a traditional understanding of the architect in third wave cohousing limits the possibility of creative interactions between citizens and the architect, but there remain some practitioners who have achieved success by subverting the expectations of their role as the designer. An example of this can

be seen in the interactions between architect Kirsti Sivén and Loppukiri (trans: 'the final spurt'), an older people's cohousing community located in the Arabiaranta neighbourhood on the outskirts of Helsinki, Finland. Sivén's engagement with the Loppukiri group suggests an opportunity for the third wave to accommodate the exploratory and socially innovative role of the architect within the pragmatic, developer-led approach. The relationship Sivén and the Loppukiri residents documented in this section was identified through a series of conversations with Sivén that took place during a field trip to Loppukiri in May 2014.

The Loppukiri group was set up by four women in 2000 and was initially established in response to the lack of suitable public housing for older people and a desire to maintain their independence as they grew older. The group were established in response to concerns about the declining provision of state supported housing for older people in Finland. Members of the group sought to create a new social and physical environment that would enable them to live independently for longer. The group felt that cohousing would provide them with the opportunity to support each other as neighbours and participate in shared social activities, although they decided from the outset that they would not provide in-home care for each other (Personal communication, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

As the group grew, they contacted the City of Helsinki Housing Production Department (ATT), who agreed to assist them in developing their community (Loppukiri Cohousing n.d.). ATT offered the group a plot as part of a wider urban redevelopment project and introduced the group to Sivén, with whom the ATT had previously worked. The ATT provided financial support that allowed the Loppukiri group to employ Sivén at an earlier stage than many third wave cohousing groups, with Sivén working with the Loppukiri group before a detailed brief had been developed.

The ability for the Loppukiri members and Sivén to interact at this early stage created opportunities for the two parties to learn more about each other prior to

the shift towards building design. For example, Sivén travelled with the Loppukiri members to attend case study trips to other cohousing communities. Sivén had not developed or experienced cohousing before so visiting these communities was a way of increasing Sivén's knowledge about cohousing, but also presented an opportunity for Sivén and the Loppukiri members to increase their knowledge of cohousing and each other through their interactions. Sivén was able to learn about the Loppukiri group through their comments and analysis of the communities they visited, and equally, the Loppukiri group were exposed to a different analytical perspective that Sivén, as an architect, was able to provide (K. Sivén, Personal communication, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

Based on these observations, Sivén developed a co-design methodology that responded to her experiences interacting with the Loppukiri members. The focus of this was to develop ways for each household to individualise the designs of the apartments through one-to-one sessions with the architect. This individualisation had to be realised within tight cost and development constraints set by the ATT, which led Sivén to create a base apartment plan in which alterations could be made without changes to the primary structure or building services. The early interactions between the Loppukiri residents and Sivén also led to other creative decisions, such as the diversity of social spaces within the building. This was the spatialisation of a wider discussion about what members of the group wanted to do once they lived in their community, which identified a desire for lots of activities, many of which would be inappropriate to house in the single, large common houses they had seen elsewhere on their field trips (Sivén and Takala n.d.).



Figure 12: Exterior of Loppukiri Cohousing in Helsinki, Finland  
(Image: Author's own)

Sivén and Loppukiri's interactions propose an alternative to the conservative understanding of the architect employed by many other third wave cohousing communities. Engaging with institutions such as ATT not only provided Loppukiri with support finding a site and managing the development process but also enabled them to employ an architect at an earlier stage.

The approach taken by Loppukiri demonstrates that the process of developing a cohousing community can offer a unique opportunity for cohousers to investigate and propose a new ideas for themselves, their community and their city. In this example, the community was able to realise the desired lived experiences through the spatial definition— a process that the architect nor the cohouser could not have achieved had the nature of their interactions been pre-defined by either party.

Despite the innovations of the approach taken by Sivén and Loppukiri, this methodology is not well known within the architectural field as the process lacks a means of communication. Details of the Loppukiri process in this thesis were derived from a face to face conversation with Sivén, rather than a journal or book. As a professional who derives business from her local reputation and relationships, there is perhaps little incentive for Sivén to publicise the process she developed in the same way that Durrett derives agency from his own writings, which he used to create a new market for his own expertise. Herein lies that challenge within the third wave of cohousing – although new forms of architectural practice have emerged, they lack a means of articulation that allows others to learn from them. The result of this is that the traditional notion of the architect as building designer are reinforced within the cohousing field.

The third wave of cohousing can be characterised by a series of internal tensions. Third wave groups seek to explore social issues through cohousing, but must equally do so within a development system that demands a lack of contingency in order to make it affordable. These group's desires are also at odds with how cohousing is presented in the field, which provides a narrow and self-perpetuating model of what cohousing is and does. These tensions are not insurmountable, but overcoming them requires a new conception to match the unique characteristics of the third wave. Rather than returning to models of the second wave, the examples set by Loppukiri and OWCH build on new opportunities that were not available to those who came before them, such as supportive housing associations, charities and political institutions. In addition, the movement within architectural education and research towards working on 'live' projects offers an opportunity for cohousing groups to work with designers at an earlier stage of their development, as demonstrated by the collaboration between myself with MUCH<sup>10</sup>. Through these new partners, a distinct role for the architect in the third wave begins to emerge, even if these practices are, at present, under-represented in outwardly facing toolkits and how-to guides within the cohousing field.

---

<sup>10</sup> This collaboration is documented in Chapter 5-7 of this thesis.

## **2.5 Conclusion: Cohousing and Spatial Agency**

The previous case studies demonstrate that each of the three waves of cohousing adopt a very different understanding of the role of the architect. The key shift that can be observed through the three waves of cohousing is a movement from cohousing as a process, to cohousing as a product. Whilst first wave cohousing started with a social vision that groups attempted to express in space, second wave cohousing offered a particular interpretation of cohousing – the social experience of an a friendly, neighbourly community. This movement has been matched by a corresponding change in how the architect is understood. The transition towards a building design role in the second wave is understandable, as the definition of what a cohousing community is or does is not in question. It is for this same reason that this perception of the architect is unsuitable for the third wave, as it limits the ability for cohousing groups to realise the social change that led them to consider cohousing in the first place.

The third wave of cohousing requires a new conception of the architect, bringing together the process-driven methodologies of the first wave with the pragmatic constraints of the second wave. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Loppukiri and Sivén, who could expand her role as the architect through new applications of architectural knowledge. Her practices demonstrate an attempt to develop a mutually affective relationship between herself and the Loppukiri residents, to negotiate the ideas of the group within other developmental constraints, and to use these interactions to enable both her and the cohousers to be creative in their propositions. Sivén's understanding of her own role rejects the notion that the building is the sole valid architectural output and seeks instead to affect change through other forms of interactions. Whilst Sivén did create the building that Loppukiri residents now live in, she also contributed to the group defining how they wanted to live as older people in their neighbourhood, and how these desires could be manifest spatially.

One of the key difference between second and third wave cohousing is the aspiration to enact social change within society. The examples of Loppukiri and OWCH show how cohousing can be used as a means of increasing the ‘agency’ of those who create or inhabit them. Agency is a sociological concept that is used to define an individual’s power to act within society. To have agency is not merely the capability to do certain things, but to act based on the will of the individual (Giddens 1984:14). In the case of third wave cohousing, the residents are empowered to express their agency through realisation of a social vision that was unachievable within their previous environments. Responding to the unaffordability to housing (LILAC 2014) or a desire to grow older in a community without patriarchal influence (OWCH n.d.) are not explicit elements of the cohousing model, but third wave groups have used cohousing as a means of achieving these aims.

The challenge facing the third wave of cohousing is enabling social ideas to emerge in a way that remains grounded in the development and financial realities it is created within. As a result, the use of cohousing as a means of realising a social vision requires a new understanding of the architect, combining the innovative potential of participatory design practiced derived ‘from’ a cohousing group with a need to adopt an efficient and reliable development process that, so far, have only been realised by reducing the level of participation the architect engages in.

Awan, Schneider and Till’s concept of ‘*spatial agency*’ (2011) offers insight into how architectural practice can respond to the challenges of the third wave of cohousing. Spatial agency proposes that architects seek ‘other ways of doing architecture’, grounded in finding ways to support people to realise social change rather than merely designing urban objects on behalf of an abstract citizen. Chapter 3 outlines the concept of spatial agency, identify the theoretical limits of the approach when applied to cohousing, and propose an expanded definition of spatial agency that was used to inform the collaborative practice I developed with Manchester Urban Cohousing.

### 3 Three parameters of Spatial Agency

The previous chapter established the diverse interpretations of ‘participation’ between the architect and cohouser, and how these interpretations have changed over time. It concluded by recognising that the emerging third wave of cohousing requires a form of participatory relationship that combines qualities from the previous two waves, but that current practices in the third wave only partially fulfil this need.

The third wave requires pragmatic and financially viable forms of practice that are sympathetic to the constraints that cohousing groups experience (designing ‘for’ and ‘with’), whilst at the same time seeking to explore innovative and creative ideas that realise the particular social visions of a cohousing group (designing ‘from’). This chapter will examine the limits and potential of Awan, Schneider and Till’s (2011) concept of ‘*spatial agency*’ as a means of generating architectural practices that fulfil these goals.

Spatial agency calls for architects to seek more socially-engaged forms of practice, rejecting the notion that architects should always act unilaterally ‘for’ others. This is based on two key positions: first, the building is not understood as the only valid form that architectural knowledge can be expressed in; and second, architects should embrace the transformative potential of working with other citizens (Awan et al. 2011:43). This chapter expands this definition to include an understanding of how the architect can generate practices ‘from’ the opportunities within cohousing. The third wave of cohousing makes it necessary for the ‘spatial agent’ to value the mutually expert knowledge that they and others hold, negotiate the often divergent desires of different cohousers, and overcome the notion that their creativity is both absolute and only applicable to the creation of built form. This chapter examines how these needs can be met through an interrogation and expansion of the current model of spatial agency. This is achieved by exploring the limitations of the theoretical underpinning of spatial agency, Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984), and proposing

that spatial agency adopts an approach that augments Giddens' model with a new theoretical position - Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977).

This chapter begins by examining the critique of the architecture profession developed by Awan et al., and how they propose architects respond to this through spatial agency. Using examples developed in Chapter 2, this chapter demonstrate the limits of structuration as a means of generating practices within the context of cohousing, identifying three parameters that require further elaboration. The three parameters are as follows;

- Mutual knowledge – the value that individuals place on their own and other people's knowledge
- Negotiated habitus – the means by which individuals accommodate different desires
- Shared creativity – the process by which individuals are able to express their desires in innovative ways through their interactions with people who challenge and expand their vision

This chapter examines each of these parameters in turn, demonstrating how Bourdieu's and Giddens' theories can make different but complimentary contributions to the development of architectural practices. This approach will then be used and tested within my collaboration with MUCH, which forms Part Two of this thesis.

### **3.1 Architecture and spatial agency**

#### **Professionalism and the autonomous architect**

Spatial Agency is grounded in a critique of the architecture profession, which Awan et al. argue constrains the architect's ability to make a positive social contribution to society. They propose that contemporary capitalist development contexts have caused the architect to recede from opportunities to engage with

the social qualities of their practice, instead focusing on fulfilling their clients needs to reduce the financial risk that comes with unpredictability.

In order to legitimise the architecture profession, the client must have confidence that the architect can provide a reliable service within time and budgetary constraints. As a result, architects seek to reduce unpredictability from their practices, primarily by removing the user from their processes. In the current development model, the citizen or user is understood as the main source of disruptive contingency. Designing 'for' the users removes opportunities for the architect's knowledge to be opened up to questioning, and thus empowers the architect to work autonomously of potential sources of unpredictability (Till 2005:35). Architects instead seek to abstract the user, discarding the potential of the user to act irrationally and thus remove a potential point of contingency from the architect's practices (Hill 2003:15). Awan et al. suggest that architects take on roles in which they are "...polishers of static form and technical manipulators of stuff" as a means of producing work that can be commodified (Awan et al. 2011:30). This, in turn, perpetuates the role of the architect as a building designer and undermines the potential for architectural knowledge to be applied in wider fields of practice.

The assertion that architects are increasingly concerned with aesthetic, formal and technical design is a product of the way architectural knowledge is valued. Architects are able to generate financial and social capital by providing a service to others, a transaction that is only possible because the architect's knowledge is valued as unique and useful. As a result, one of the key aims of the architecture profession is demonstrating that they are experts within certain contexts, and that, "... only architects create buildings and spaces that deserve the title architecture." (Hill 2003:3). This is not a new development – the creation of the Royal Institute of British Architects in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be understood as an attempt to create a distinction between the educated architect and the master craftsman as a means of defining and distinguishing architectural expertise, and legitimising the architect as the sole creator of architecture (Wilton-Ely 1977:181–93). Till argues that this understanding of the architect as form maker

has led to ethical principles being overlooked by architects, who instead seek to reinforce their profession. Till suggests that this response is based on a fear that deviating from an understanding of the architect as a form-builder will undermine their ability to use their knowledge as a marketable asset (Till 2005:28).

Attempts to defend the architect's authorial role by limiting the link between the architect and the society they practice within have proved to be an "...increasingly ineffectual attempt to ensure disciplinary survival in the face of commercial pressures..." (White 2017:129). In limiting their role to the creation of buildings, the architect's agency within the development process has been eroded through the emergence of specialised design and management professionals. The professional architect's desire to advocate for the citizens, even through abstraction, is viewed as a negative quality to those who commission urban development (RIBA 2010:14). The professional responsibility of providing a service for a specific client is juxtaposed against the fundamental position within the profession that, "Architectural service is of quintessential worth for mankind." (Lipman 1970:14)<sup>11</sup>. The result is that neither goal is achieved, as the architect has little agency to develop socially engaged practices, and developers hold a belief that "...architects are arrogant and focused on embodying their own ideologies rather than providing a service to clients." (RIBA 2010:14).

Whilst it is comfortable to retreat to autonomous fields of practice, Awan et al. argue that the architectural discipline must be redefined in order to prevent the continual marginalisation of the profession, which they suggest can be realised through the discovery of "other ways of doing architecture" (Awan et al. 2011). Till and Schneider suggest that "To admit to the possibility of doing otherwise is counter-intuitive to the professional, who is brought up on the foundation of certain knowledge leading to certain solutions." (Schneider and Till 2009:98).

---

<sup>11</sup> Lipman, an architect, acted upon this assertion by undertaking pioneering research that linked architecture to the field of gerontology, particularly in with regards to the design of retirement and care homes (Lipman, Slater, and Harris 1979)

Despite this, Awan et al. argue that the architecture profession can thrive by exploring new forms of practice. The architect must accept that they are operating in fields of uncertainty, and to be confident that their knowledge equips them well to act within this contingent fields. In response their critique of the autonomous, building focused architect, Awan et al. suggest a new role for the architect as a spatial agent who seeks new forms of interactions with a wider range of actors.

### **Spatial agency and the socially engaged architect**

Awan, Schneider and Till's critique of the architectural profession should be understood "...as a means for positive action..." rather than a detached evaluation of the profession's limitations (Awan et al. 2011:27).

They use this to propose 'spatial agency' as a new architectural paradigm, which challenges traditional notions of the architect in two ways: First, it enables the "...inclusion of others, amateurs, in the processes" of design; and second, by rejecting the idea of "...the building as the sole source and representation of expertise" expressed by the architect (Awan et al. 2011:43). Both positions require the architect to reconceive the nature of architectural knowledge by opening themselves up to the knowledge of others, whilst equally valuing their own knowledge in new ways and the potential (non-built) outcomes it can produce. By collaborating with people who are usually disempowered from processes of urban development, the spatial agent is able to engage in the social, political and ethical contexts of their practice in ways that a traditional architect cannot.

The call for architects to engage with citizens in new ways is cognisant of past interpretations of 'community architecture', particularly the potential for the architects relinquishing their power when practicing 'with' and 'from' the user (Till 1998). Instead, spatial agency is grounded in a belief that architectural knowledge is an asset, but must be applied in a way that allows the architect to be "...much more than a mere technical facilitator but at the same time is not tarnished with the brush of unfettered power." (Till 2005:39, 2009:52). Awan

et al. identify the spatial agent as someone who "...effects change through the empowerment of others, allowing them to engage in spatial environments in ways previously unknown or unavailable to them" (2011:32). Rather than this focusing only on empowering others, spatial agency equally posits that the architect can empower themselves by making their knowledge "...negotiable, flexible and, above all, shared with others." (Awan et al. 2011:32).

Central to these new interactions is a transition away from autonomous practices, with the architect instead challenged to embracing the contingency experienced when they open up their knowledge to be affected by others. The architect must engage in situations where they are able to affect people through the expression of their knowledge, whilst the user has an equal opportunity "...to actively transform the knowledge of the architect." (Till 2005:33). Spatial agency is thus based on the idea that architects can better increase their capabilities by embracing the fluidity of their own knowledge through contingent interactions, as opposed to protecting their knowledge within autonomous forms of practice.

The transition away from the architect as an autonomous expert requires a corresponding movement that conceives architectural practice as more than the production of built form. This is not to say that the technical knowledge required to produce a building is not valued in spatial agency, as many examples given by Awan et al. (including cohousing) feature the creation of architectural form. High quality design and aesthetics can have an important role in empowering individuals within society, but equally some examples of spatial agency forego the creation of built form entirely. Examples of this include the subversion of urban policy, the promotion of marginalised groups in the city and the political activation of residents through shared endeavour. (Awan et al. 2011:56–58). The outcome of the spatial agent's practice should be seen as anything that enables individuals to generate the agency to reshape the city and their place within it, which will always have a spatial quality but may not have a physical, architectonic form.

By breaking the link between architectural knowledge and the production of the physical world, spatial agency acts to break the causal link between “designing a building” and “making the world a better place.” (Awan et al. 2011:37).

Schneider and Till argue that;

“... architects can claim a useful role as agents of change, not through opportunistic deployment of technical gadgetry but through critique and subsequent transformations of the conditions – social, spatial and political – that have led us into the plight we are in.”

(Schneider and Till 2009:109)

Spatial agency presents an “...explicit call for architects to face up to their political and ethical responsibility”, which is mirrored by “...a call for all those involved in the production of the built environment to engage with the precepts of spatial agency.” (Schneider and Till 2009:108). Herein lies the key to spatial agency; it is not just a new way of practising architecture, but also a new form of relationship that creates the condition for both architect and citizen to generate social change. Only by accepting that the architect is part of a more complex network of social relations outside of the building profession can “...architecture play an ultimately positive role instead of being seen as part of the social or economic problem.” (Awan et al. 2011:58).

There is a lack of direct criticism of the spatial agency approach within the architectural field. Whilst this could be a consequence of the relatively recent publication of Awan et al.’s main treatise on the matter, previous research by Till suggests a more fundamental issue. He argues that, “Critics of participation are few and far between; it is seen as politically unpalatable to be seen to challenge something so eminently sensible” (Till 2005:25). Rather than a positive, the limited criticism of socially engaged architectural practices is problematic to the development of spatial agency. Till laments that “...mainstream architectural culture is in a state of denial about participation, a denial that is tantamount to rejection but without the need to be explicit about

it.” (2005:25). Whilst spatial agency has no overt critics, the principles behind it are scarcely put into action by the majority of architects.

### **Cohousing as a site of spatial agency**

Based on the call for architects to work more directly with citizens and to engage with the social, political and ethical qualities of their practices, cohousing can be understood as a potential site of spatial agency. Although the nature of the architect-cohouser relationship differs between the three waves, all suggest qualities of spatial agency.

The first wave of cohousing fulfilled both qualities of spatial agency, as the architect and cohousers were all equal parts of a resident-led group seeking to challenge social orthodoxies around child-raising and gender relationships. The second wave is more complicated, simultaneously demonstrating the critique established in spatial agency and the response proposed by it. Durrett (2009) understood that stability and a lack of contingency was important to making his practices viable, and thus sought to reduce the role of the user and limit the social potential of the model. Despite this, his approach enabled many more people to develop cohousing, and thus making a contribution to society that would not have been possible had he acted as a building designer alone. The third wave is still emerging, but features the return of social, political and ethical concerns as a key rationale for undertaking cohousing. The need to respond to the social aims of cohousers makes it necessary for the architect-cohouser relationship to be grounded in a mutually enabling interactions, such as those identified within spatial agency.

In *‘Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture’* (2011), Awan et al. cite two examples of cohousing to demonstrate how cohousing acts as a site of spatial agency.

The first example, Tinggården in Denmark, was created to enable architectonic flexibility, which allows households to “... expand or shrink their house

according to need, by adding or relinquishing rooms to adjoining flats.” (Awan et al. 2011:122). This demonstrates the architect as a spatial agent because they are acting non-hierarchically by promoting the users capability to generate the environment that suits their needs over time using their knowledge both of building design, and the existing capabilities of those they designed with.



Figure 13: Photo of Tinggården Cohousing  
(Image: Vandkunsten 1979)

The second example they provide is Springhill Cohousing in Stroud, UK, which Awan et al. use to describe the application of a participatory design approach that the residents developed with their architect Architype. Stroud exhibits qualities of second wave cohousing including a focus on neighbourly interactions, with the group citing Durrett and McCamant as key influences of their early designs (Springhill Cohousing 2017). Awan et al. note that the community was, “Designed by Architype in consultation with future residents...” and that “...through a careful mixture of spatial design, common amenities and formal social structure cohousing is able to encourage social interaction between residents.” (Awan et al. 2011:122–23).



Figure 14: Photo of Springhill Cohousing  
(Image: “Springhill Cohousing” n.d.)

Although this case study is limited in scope, both of these examples show how architects use their design knowledge to increase the agency of the cohousers who they collaborated with. Tinggården uses design as a means of increasing the agency over the long term, using technical knowledge to empower residents to continually reshape their community. Springhill enabled residents to contribute directly at the outset, expressing elements of their ideals through aesthetic and technical form. Although spatial agency calls for the architecture to reject built form as the sole expression of their knowledge, these examples demonstrate the importance of design expertise in producing both empowering design processes and appropriate architectural products.

The use of case studies within *‘Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture’* fulfils the authors goal of demonstrating the diversity of ways to realise spatial agency, but in doing draws exclusively on previous practices. Their focus on understanding how spatial agency has been used in cohousing fails to provide insight into how spatial agency could be applied in cohousing, particularly in the emerging third wave.

Part Two of this thesis seeks to test spatial agency as an approach to developing cohousing through collaboration with MUCH, a third wave cohousing group. Whilst cohousing is identified as a site of spatial agency by Awan et al., their focus on second wave cohousing and the lack of analysis into the architect-cohouser interactions provide little insight into how the architect should respond to cohousing. In order to develop practices that fulfil the specific needs of third wave cohousing, spatial agency must expand from a conceptual framework for a new architectural paradigm into a theory of practice that is responsive to the qualities of cohousing.

### **3.2 Cohousing and the theory of structuration**

Spatial agency is presented as a broad strategy for reconceiving the architect, but it consciously makes no attempt to provide a practical methodology for spatial agents to follow. Awan et al identify 136 examples of spatial agency to demonstrate their theory (Awan et al. 2011:33). These include broad concepts such as ‘participation’, specific architecture practices, design movements, alternative mediums such as ‘zines’, and individual projects in which buildings or spaces are developed or appropriated (Awan et al. 2011:85–214). By identifying examples of spatial agency, their aim was not to present a guide as to how architects should act but outline the diverse ways that architects have expanded their practices beyond autonomous architectonic design (Awan et al. 2011:69).

The onus is placed on the spatial agents themselves to extrapolate on the broad strategy of spatial agency in response to the specific conditions they seek to practice within. For example, cohousing has specific qualities that would influence how the spatial agent could or should act that are not specifically part of the overall spatial agency approach. In cohousing, examples of this include the negotiative requirement that comes with a collective, democratic client, or the support needs of novice cohousers with little or no development experience. In order to understand how spatial agency can be used to generate and test architectural practices in cohousing, an expanded definition of spatial agency must be constructed to take into account the specific characteristics and

conditions seen within cohousing. This is achieved by interrogating the theoretical underpinnings of spatial agency to highlight the limits and contradictions of the approach in relation to cohousing.

### **Structuration theory**

Spatial agency is based on the theoretical framework of Anthony Giddens, in particular around the concept of structuration (1984). The theory of structuration attempts to make sense of why change occurs in society, and who/what has the power to make these changes happen. It does this through a conception of agency (*individuals*) and structure (*society*), which Giddens proposes should be seen as a duality rather than two independent forces. He refers to this duality as 'structuration' - the conceptually indivisible duality of agency and structure that constitutes society.

Spatial agency adopts the structuration concept as a way of demonstrating that the architect is not all powerful, but equally is not completely subservient to the society they practice within. Giddens provides a means of understanding the power dynamics experienced within the architecture profession, and presents an alternative model of agency to the exchange-driven, service provider model adopted in traditional architecture. Till and Schneider note that "...to accept Giddens' sense of agency is to accept a new sense of what it means to be an architect" (Schneider and Till 2009:98)

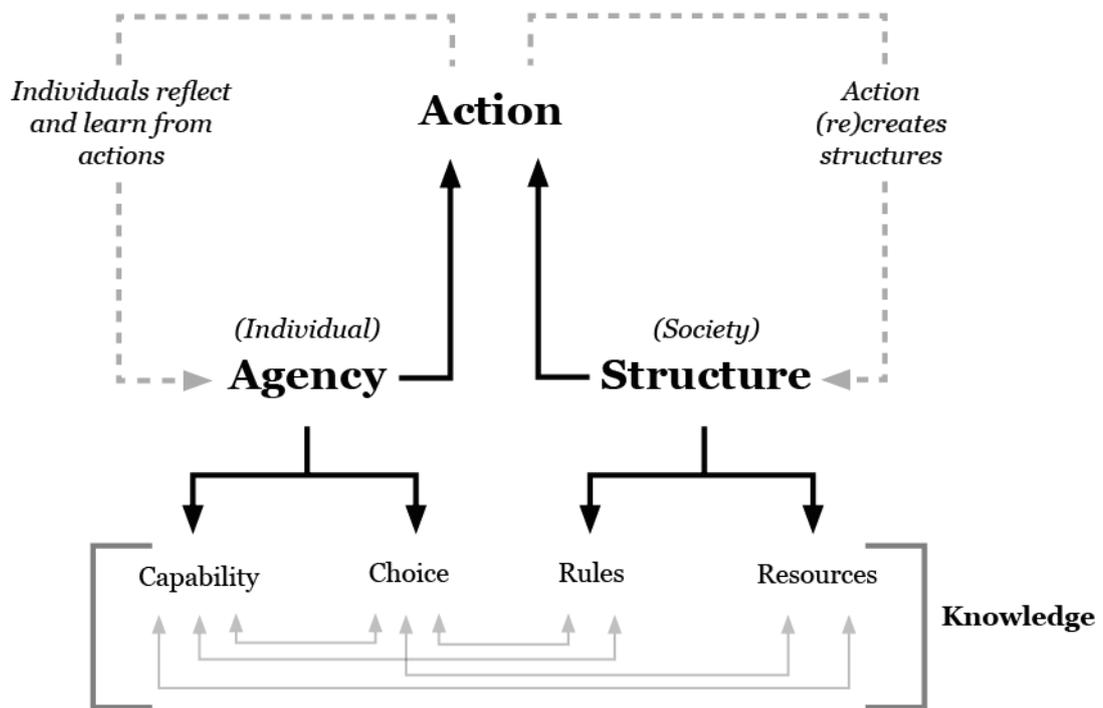


Figure 15: Conceptual diagram of Giddens' structuration approach  
(Author's own)

Figure 15 shows a conceptual diagram of Giddens' structuration approach. It demonstrates a number of key characteristics within structuration, each of which providing a means of analysing how individuals and society are constituted. These are **agency** (individual), **structure** (society) and **action** – the actualisation of the duality of agency and structure (structuration) at a specific point in time and space. Each of these aspects of structuration is linked by knowledge, the means by which individuals understand society and their place within it. The diagram shows the reflexive nature of Giddens' approach, manifest in two forms. First, actions act to reinforce or challenge the structures they are informed by. Second, individuals reflect on their own action, which alters how they understand their capabilities and the choices available to them. The study will use these to analyse the architect's role in the production of cohousing, from which he will identify the opportunities and limitations of Giddens as a theoretical basis of spatial agency with regards to cohousing.

Cohousing provides an intriguing context in which to interrogate the spatial agency model, highlighting both the opportunities and limits of the approach. The interactions the architect must have are simultaneous with the user and the client, conducted as both the individual and the collective, seeking to realise both social and physical vision. Tested against cohousing, it is possible to identify a number of limits to spatial agency. These will be explored throughout the remainder of this chapter, but can be summarised as a limited understanding of the agent's motivations, a lack of flexibility to understand different forms of expertise, and the marginalisation of the user's creativity. These three parameters can be understood as a product of Giddens' structuration approach, and suggest that an expanded model of spatial agency is required to respond to the specific complexities presented in cohousing. To overcome these limits, it is necessary to develop a hybrid theoretical position that expands upon Giddens' structuration approach in a way that is more suitable to the context of cohousing. This is achieved by integrating a number of elements of Bourdieu's (1977) *'theory of practice'* into the model of structuration previously pursued by Awan et al. I will use Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and 'field' to construct a *hybrid theory of structuration* that overcomes the limits to spatial agency that can be identified in relation to cohousing.

Similar to Giddens' structuration, Bourdieu's theory of practice seeks to analyse how individuals create the society they inhabit through their actions within it. Whilst they share a broad theoretical framework based on society as a duality of agency and structure, the qualities of each of these elements are subtly different. Bourdieu's theory of practice can be seen as a complementary social theory to structuration. Both Giddens and Bourdieu agree that society can influence and shape the agency of individual, but equally the actions or practices of individuals have the capacity to reconstitute society in different ways (Sewell 1992:15; Tucker 1998:71).



This hybrid theory proposes three changes to the approach proposed by Giddens, which are highlighted in blue.

First, Giddens' interpretation of structure is replaced by Bourdieu's model of 'fields'. This allows a reconceptualisation of the expert-novice dynamic between cohouser and architect, and enables a better understanding of the cohousers different forms of expertise. This in turn enables the emergence of architect-cohouser relationships that challenge the idea of the architect acting solely as a building designer and the cohouser operating only as a commissioning client.

Second, the concept of 'habitus' replaces 'choice' as a determinant of agency. This allows an understanding of the motivation that underpins the agent's choices, which are driven by their social, political and ethical dispositions. This is important because a cohousing community is not just created through the negotiation of spatial forms into a single community, but through a negotiation of the differently motivated social visions held by the group.

Third, these two changes enable action to be understood as a form of 'creativity'. Giddens provides no means of conceptualising creativity due to a reliance on reflexivity to inform action, but the inclusion of Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus allow a cohousing group to be understood as a shared discourse in which creativity is derived from the interactions between agents within it.

The next section will examine each of these parameters in terms of cohousing, particularly the case studies identified in the chapter two. This will be used to identify the limits of Giddens' approach for each, and proposing how incorporating elements from Bourdieu's theory of practice helps to resolve these limits.

### **3.3 Structure and mutual knowledge**

As previously stated, spatial agency is informed by an expansion of architecture beyond an autonomous role as a building designer. The power that architects

derive from the profession can be viewed as a part of a wider societal structure that is used to reinforce and undermine the capabilities of different groups. The formal qualifications held by architects are a prominent example of this. Qualifications can be seen as a socially agreed distinction that allows people to assume that the holder's knowledge and expertise are of a suitable quality and validity. Any interaction between the architect and other citizens is thus impacted by the mutually perceived expertise of the architect within the field of architecture. It also means that individuals knowledgeable about fields without formal recognition, such as an individual's knowledge of their own social condition, are dismissed by both parties because the structures of society do not attribute value to these forms of knowledge.

In cohousing, the members of a cohousing group are often novice developers and thus presented as non-experts, whilst other professionals (such as architects) are considered experts. This is an issue of framing – cohousers are expert about a myriad of subjects, not least their own desires, but when considered in terms of a design process they are deemed non-expert. This has the potential to generate power hierarchies, preventing either group from being empowered by the knowledge held by the other.

Spatial agency calls for architects to embrace the knowledge of others, but it equally provides a limited conception of the knowledge held by non-architects. Cohousing demonstrates a need for an expanded definition of knowledge in spatial agency, in which the cohouser is understood as having expertise unique to themselves. This requires an expansion of Giddens' notion of 'mutual knowledge'; the shared knowledge exchanged within the interactions of differently expert individuals (Awan et al. 2011:32).

### **Structure as rules and resources**

In Giddens' model of structuration, all knowledge is constructed and validated through the structure of society, which is continually reconstructed through the actions of individuals within it (Giddens 1979:5). It is through an understanding

of the 'rules' and 'resources' of society that individuals develop knowledge, which in turn gives them the power to act alone and interact with others.

Giddens rejects the notion of structure as constraint, instead adopting a position that structures provide a vehicle for transformative action. For Giddens, structures provide an individual with the capability to act, but these structures are neither fixed nor outside of the influence of agents. Whilst there are elements of society that are commonly interpreted and thus reinforced, the structures of society can and do change based on the actions of individuals which are observed, experienced and replicated by other individuals (Giddens 1984:15–16). This is an important aspect of the use of Giddens for spatial agency because it validates the notion that architects can affect social change through their actions within society.

Giddens' conceptualisation of structure consists of two elements – the *rules* of social interactions and the *resources* of society that are available to an individual. The architecture profession can be seen as an example of rules and resources operating within a structure. Giddens suggests that *rules* should be understood as “techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices.” (Giddens 1984:21). These are not fixed constraints such as laws, but instead social norms that people use to direct and frame their interactions with others. An example of this in architecture is the architect's use of an expert professional language (both visual and lingual) during their interactions with clients as a means of increasing or maintaining their capability to act.

Resources refer to the different ways that agents can mobilise power through their interactions with material and social aspects of society. Again, resources are not fixed or universal qualities of society but interpreted by individuals based on the context of their actions (Giddens 1984:258–60, 373). For the architect, the existence of the architecture profession itself provides a resource because it gives their knowledge validity. The notion that a 'qualified' architect is of higher value and esteem than an 'unqualified' architect is derived from a

societal respect for education and accreditation that is accepted and reinforced by a large number of citizens. The values that society place on accreditation exist for good reason, as the skills and expertise of the architect do distinguish them for other individuals. The confidence given to an architect based on their membership to a profession is accepted within the structures of society because the profession has a track record of success. Despite this, the value placed on the architect's expertise only exists as long as society deems with worthwhile. Spatial agency is grounded in an understanding that the power derived from the accreditation of the architect is not a fixed resource, as demonstrated by the architect's diminishing agency to contribute to urban production. As a result, the architecture profession must change if it wants to retain or increase their power to intervene in the world.

Giddens understands structure as a societal totality to be interpreted by the individual. Each individual agent understands the rules and resources of society differently based on their abilities to create an "...accurate or valid awareness..." of the "...rules and tactics whereby everyday life is constituted." (Giddens 1984:90). This accurate awareness, that Giddens calls 'knowledgeability', refers to an individual's continual monitoring of society and their practices within it. This is a personal rather than universal knowledge, and therefore an architect might have a very different knowledgeability of society to other citizens based on their different experiences and reflections of society.

Giddens' model of structure as a societal totality makes it difficult to conceptualise the different forms that expertise might take, and leads spatial agency to understand the knowledge of the architect and citizen differently. Awan et al. make a distinction between the architect as having 'discursive' knowledge of the subject, and agents such as cohousers having a 'mutual' knowledge of wider society (Awan et al. 2011:32). Discursive knowledge is a specific expertise within a subject that is not widely understood, such as architecture. Mutual knowledge, on the other hand, is defined as a tacit, practical understanding of how society is constituted that provides all individuals with the ability to act in society (Giddens 1984:4, 336–37).

Spatial agency seeks to remove the hierarchies of power within architectural practice by creating situations in which the architect's discursive knowledge is challenged and augmented by the mutual knowledge held by non-architects. The problem with this is that spatial agency frames all interactions in terms of architectural practice, and therefore assumes that only the architect can only have discursive knowledge. This ignores the potential that the citizen have discursive expertise of their own, and limits the citizen's potential to empower the architect through this expertise.

For example, an architect and a cohouser might be differently expert about cohousing. An architect would be expected to be knowledgeable about processes and actions that the cohouser would have little knowledge of, such as the spatial implications of cohousing, how to create a suitable participatory process, and how to guide a client through the development process. Equally, the cohouser is knowledgeable about their own desires for their community, but could also be knowledgeable about the history of cohousing and the experiences of other cohousing groups based on their initial research that led them to start or join a cohousing group.

Overcoming this limitation of spatial agency requires a conception of structure with a broader concept of expertise. This thesis proposes Bourdieu's concept of 'fields' to achieve this.

### **Structure as fields of discourse**

Bourdieu posits that knowledge is constructed within 'fields' of discourse. A field is the arena of interaction between knowledgeable agents, in which individuals attempt to assert their authority and increase their own agency by defining what has legitimacy and value (Webster 2011:66). Like Giddens' structuration approach, this is based on a duality between agency and structure. An individual's actions contribute to a perpetual reimagining of the field, but the individual's actions are informed by the norms of the field (Bourdieu 1977:166–69).

For Bourdieu, the field refers to a discursive rather than spatial arena. The primary concern of any field is its own existence, which is achieved by demonstrating that the field is both distinct from other fields and of value to society. These two aspects enable some actors who contribute to a field to gain power from it, and causes others to try to change the field in a way that makes their own expertise more valuable within it (Dovey 1999:40). Cohousing provides a good example of a 'field'. Through the three waves it is possible to see how the field has been continually reproduced through the actions of individual agents, but there remains a shared belief in the very existence of the field and the effort to demonstrate the importance it has to society.

Bourdieu's concept of the field is useful because it acknowledges better the breadth of knowledge people can have. A field can focus on a profession such as architecture, but could equally be structured around a cultural concept, social class or gender. This understanding of structure enables the expert-novice dialectic within spatial agency to be overcome, as both the cohouser and architect to be understood as experts within multiple fields of practice. The architect's knowledge is partially constituted through field of 'architecture' but could also be derived from any number of fields, including cohousing. Equally, the cohouser's knowledge could be informed by their profession (past or present), or from any number of fields they practice within. In Bourdieu's model, it is possible for both the cohouser and architect to operate within the field of cohousing, with each party differently expert in the same field.

### **Cohousing as a field of discourse**

Cohousing can be understood as a field that generates both rules and resources. It is constructed and reinforced by the actions of individuals, and thus it is open to change. Architects, as practitioners within the field of cohousing, have influenced the development of cohousing structures in a variety of ways.

The first wave of cohousing adopted and built upon other communal living concepts to inform their ideas. The lack of definition within the cohousing field

at this early stage provided fewer rules that cohousing groups and architects would be influenced by, but equally provided fewer resources to enable them to act. The emergence of the Bo I Gemenskap (trans: 'live in community') group in the late 1970s, funded by the Swedish Building Research Council, began to consolidate ideas about cohousing into accessible formats to support the emergence of new cohousing groups (Vestbro 2008:7), thus providing both inspiration for new groups, as well as defining cohousing as a specific concept.

The macro political climate of 1970s Scandinavian society provided resources through which cohousing groups were able to be experimental and socially radical, resources that were not available to the second wave of cohousing in 1980s America. The second wave of cohousing is notable because the relatively loose structures of the first wave became increasingly formalised by the emergence of accessible cohousing literature, particularly for English-speaking audiences. The two cohousing guides developed by Durrett and McCamant set out a series of rules as to what constitutes 'cohousing' and provides a number of resources to support new cohousing groups. Durrett and McCamant present their interpretation of cohousing and how it should be created, shifting the field of cohousing in the process. Durrett and McCamant's innovation was to use their literature to communicate a model of cohousing to appeal to the society they operated within, seeking to facilitate to a developer-led approach that acknowledges financial constraints and attempted to mitigate against potential conflict in the development process. Durrett and McCamant are key contributors to the development of cohousing as a field, with the resources available to those seeking to achieve ethical or political goals marginalised by their new rules of cohousing, which focused more on near-universally desired qualities like good neighbourly relations.

The third wave of cohousing is emerging at a time when the structures of cohousing have begun to mature. Durrett and McCamant's model had spurred an increased uptake in cohousing in the US, which had, in turn, reinforced the approach they developed through widespread adoption. Despite this, the structures of cohousing continued to evolve. Prospective cohousing groups

began to see the potential of the cohousing approach beyond the realisation of good neighbourly relationships, and thus began to interpret the rules of the cohousing field differently. Whereas some might continue to ascribe to Durrett and McCamants assertion that cohousing is not a political act, others chose to challenge this part of the field. This was enabled by the emergence of charities and social housing providers in the cohousing field, which reshaped the landscape of resources that could be accessed through cohousing. These new resources allowed architects to engage with cohousing groups in ways that challenge temporary orthodoxy set out by Durrett and McCamant and others within the second wave of cohousing.

### **Mutual Knowledge**

Considering structure as multiple fields of discourse allows for a reconceptualisation of knowledge in spatial agency, particularly with regards to the expert-novice paradigm between the architect and those they work with. The understanding of structure as multiple and overlapping fields of expertise allows both architect and cohouser to value their own knowledge *and* the knowledge of other agents. In cohousing this is pertinent because the architect's expertise is understood as potentially disempowering to cohousing groups, a position put forward in a number of literature sources within the field (Durrett 2009; UK Cohousing Network 2012).

Creating a broader understanding of expertise within a hybrid theory of structuration also enables a different understanding of mutual knowledge. A hierarchical model of the expert architect and non-expert cohouser leads to the creation of a dependency dynamics that underpin an architects ability to work 'for' or 'with' the cohouser. Recognising that both parties are differently expert enables practices 'from' the collaboration between architect and cohouser to develop. Mutual knowledge can be generated and expanded through the interactions between experts in which both have knowledge to offer and gain, rather than through a one-way transfer of knowledge from expert to non-expert.

The development of mutual knowledge can be seen throughout the history of cohousing as a means of enabling both cohousers and architects to increase their agency. The first wave of cohousing understands the architect as one of many knowledgeable agents within the group's development, with the architect increasing their capability by accessing the knowledge of others. The expertise of the architect in these early communities was not limited by their inability to act autonomously, but expanded because their knowledge interacts with the knowledge of other people. The second wave architect had a more limited conception of mutual knowledge as a result of the pragmatic drive for participation that sought to design 'for' and 'with' cohousers. Architects such as Durrett promoted their own expertise as a means of delineating parts of cohousing in which participation was not necessary, such as through the legitimization of design standards that enabled social interaction. As such, the mutual knowledge that Durrett allowed to emerge was controlled by him, rather than emerging through the expertise of both the architect and the cohousers.

In the third wave, there is an emerging divergence of the approach in relation to mutual knowledge. Some communities seek traditional design-focused relationships where the architect's knowledge is limited to the creation of form (designing 'for'). This creates and perpetuates a hierarchy between expert and non-expert in which there is no opportunity for the architect and cohouser to share knowledge and mutually affect each other. Other third wave communities such as Loppukiri have demonstrated a greater application of mutual knowledge (designing 'with' and 'from'). By travelling with the group to a number of cohousing communities the architect Sivén was exposed to the Loppukiri members own analysis of cohousing, enabling her to better understand not only what they wanted for their community, but how she could support them to create it within the process she was designing.

For the autonomous architect, the idea that the user is an expert in their own right poses a challenge to their own agency. The architecture field is predicated on the understanding that the architect is uniquely expert – a perspective that is

held by architects and other, such as cohousers, alike. It is therefore not only necessary for the architect to reconsider the knowledge they bring to the collaboration, but it is also necessary for cohousers to develop a new understanding of the architect's expertise. The development of mutual knowledge in cohousing therefore requires both the architect and cohouser to feel that their own knowledge has value within their interactions, and that both are able to affect the other in mutually positive ways.

An individual's capability to act is based on their knowledge of the rules and resources available to them, but 'agency' cannot be understood just as capability alone. Summarising his conception of agency, Giddens states that;

“Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently”

(Giddens 1984:14)

This quote raises two central aspects to Giddens' model of agency – agency is based on *capability and choice*. The next section explores the notion of choice, using Bourdieu's concept of the habitus to suggest that choices are determined by the social, political and ethical dispositions of the individual, rather than through an unconscious process of reflection.

### **3.4 Agency and negotiated habitus**

Cohousing offers individuals the opportunity to create a new set of experiences and relationships, and to create an alternative to the experiences they expect to have in mainstream housing. As such, cohousing represents a medium for individuals to increase their agency – their capability to act based on the results they desire. One of the characteristics of cohousing is that a cohousing group involves many people with different sets of desires, but these must be realised within a single community. In a traditional understanding of the architect, this

negotiation takes place on the side of the client, formalised as a written design brief. Spatial agency demands an alternative to the divisions between form and programme – a form of interaction in which the architect utilises their knowledge to enable others to increase their agency. In cohousing, this means supporting cohousers to create a brief that negotiates the desires of the group within space, rather than seeking to eliminate difference of opinion. In order to conceptualise this, it is necessary to expand the current definition of spatial agency to include concepts of motivation and desire, for which Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides an appropriate framework.

### **Agency as capability and choice**

Giddens proposes that agency is the ability for an individual to act 'differently', implying that the individual, or 'actor' as he describes them more commonly, has a *choice* between two or more actions. Giddens proposes that, "To be able to 'act otherwise' means to be able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs." (1984: 14). Acting otherwise does not refer to a random decision to act expectantly, but a purposeful trajectory towards an unknown outcome based on the continual assessment of available options. The ability to act otherwise is a central component of spatial agency, as it informs the notion that architect's actions should not be limited to the creation of buildings. An architect could choose not to intervene, or intervene in a multitude of different ways in order to change a process or situation. Conversely, Giddens notes that agency cannot be defined by intention or ideal alone, and that "...an agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', that is, to exercise some sort of power." (Giddens 1984:10–12).

The agency of the architect is constructed individually and through their interactions in society. A key position within structuration is that any agent's capability and choices are relational to the contexts they are practiced in. For example, if second wave cohousing innovator Durrett had adopted a first wave model of cohousing in the USA he would not have had the capability to act upon it due to the societal structured he would practice within. The societal structures

of 1980s America were very different to 1970's Scandinavia, and thus actions that people were capable of achieving in the first wave would be more challenging for Durrett. As Durrett was conscious of the societal constraints he experienced, he made a choice to reconceptualise cohousing in a way that provided him with the capability to act. Durrett has agency because he was able to negotiate his choices with a means of generating capability.

Similarly in the third wave, a change in the societal conditions allowed architects to realise different capabilities, and thus make different choices. For Loppukiri, the presence of a housing associate gave them the capability to employ an architect at an earlier pre-design phase, and thus allowed architect Sivén to gain the agency to engage with the cohousers in co-investigatory field trips. This enabled Sivén to understand the capabilities and choices of the cohousers she was to work with, based on their responses to these visit, and thus influenced her eventual design approach accordingly.

One of the characteristics of spatial agency is the use of participation and new relationships with citizens as a means of expanding the choices available to architects, namely the capability to choose socially engaged practices. Despite this, the use of Giddens approach lacks a key element – an understanding of why individuals want to make the choices they do. Whilst Giddens' approach is useful in describing the role of the architect within society and the profession, it is limited with regards to the motivations that drive the architect and those they collaborate with.

### **Limitations of Giddens' agency model**

The examples of Sættedammen and Skråplanet, the first wave cohousing communities discussed in chapter two, demonstrate the limits of Giddens approach in regards to the 'choices' that individuals make. In this case study, some of the cohousers chose to develop a community with a new childcare concept, and others chose to leave the group and create a different community with a different social vision. Both sets of people were faced with the same choice and were equally capable of making a decision either way, but this choice

was filtered through the political, social and ethical qualities of the individual. This conceptualisation of choice as a decision motivated by a person's belief system is currently problematic within the theory of spatial agency, as Giddens considers choices to be primarily routine, reflexive decisions made by the individual (Giddens 1984:6).

Giddens' conception of agency is grounded in habitual day-to-day choices, rather than the potentially transformative choices involved in the production of cohousing. He argues that motivation is only a marginal determinant of the choices people make;

“Motivation refers to potential for action rather than the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent. Motives tend to have a direct purchase in action only in relatively unusually circumstances, situations which in some way break with the routine.”

(Giddens 1984:6)

Giddens' assertion that motivation is an unconscious, routine act is problematic in the context of my investigation as the choices made by architects and cohousers in the act of design can scarcely be viewed as routine, and the whole rationale of cohousing is challenging these routines to create a new relationship with the city.

Whilst spatial agency seeks to promote ways for the architect to re-engage with social and political concerns through their actions, Giddens alone provide only a limited framework for understanding how these concerns motivate architects to act as agents. A complementary approach to conceiving motivation can be seen in Bourdieu's concept of the 'habitus'.

### **Habitus as motivation for agency**

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is analogous with Giddens' concept of choice, but it integrates an understanding of the ethical, social and political motivations that direct how an agent chooses to act.

Bourdieu suggests that in order to understand the actions of individuals it is necessary to “...construct the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices...” (Bourdieu 1977:72). In this, Bourdieu is suggesting that an analysis of action is reliant on an understanding of how and why these practices are created. To do this he constructs a conceptual entity, which he calls the ‘habitus’, which is able to account both for why and how people choose to act. He describes the habitus as follows;

“...a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diverse tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems...”

(Bourdieu 1977:82–83)

These dispositions, actions, experiences and perceptions form “...a set of structured beliefs about reality” that the individuals uses to inform the choices that they make, and to make sense of other actions they experience (Dovey 1999:20). This can range from perspectives regarding what constitutes a ‘good life’ to dispositions regarding “...state, authority, justice, democracy, class, status, gender, efficiency and the public interest.” (Dovey 1999:45). These structured beliefs about reality are generated through an agent’s experiences throughout their life, in which they make sense of their own actions and the observed actions of others. This should not be understood as a mechanical act of action and reflection in which an individual learns how to respond to the situations they previously experience, but instead as a means of creating a rationale for all future practices through a reflexive process (Bourdieu 1977:88). The habitus of the architect inevitably directs their practices, and is a product not only of their educational and professional experiences within architecture, but also their experiences of life in its entirety. This is an important distinction, as Giddens’ approach alone does not provide a rationale for the choices that lead to action, but rather accepts choices as a reflexive product of the individual. The

habitus thus allows any practice to be analysed with regards to an otherwise hidden aspect of the individual – their ethics, politics, fears and hopes for themselves and society.

### **Negotiated Habitus**

Spatial agency calls for the architect to reconnect with the social and political contexts of their practices, which in cohousing is provided by the cohousers themselves – politically and ethically motivated individuals seeking to realise social change. The choice to develop a cohousing community is itself a product of the cohousers habitus – an expression of their desires and beliefs through action. Agency in cohousing can, therefore, be understood as the capability for an individual to spatialise their habitus. A novel quality of cohousing is that it is not one person realising their habitus in space, but a group of individuals attempting to realise their habitus together. This is an inherent quality of cohousing – a recognition that individuals can achieve more together than they can alone.

By including Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, the role of the spatial agent in cohousing can be understood as an act of negotiation. Whilst cohousing groups might define themselves by a single vision, they are constituted from a range of people with a diversity of desires and dispositions. The challenge facing the architect and cohouser is to find a way of mediating different habitus into a single set of actions or propositions. Understanding the spatial agent as the negotiator of multiple habitus provides improved insight into the architect's role in cohousing.

The first wave of cohousing understands the architect as a spatial negotiator by virtue of their engagement in the group at early stages of project definition. The second wave makes little attempt to negotiate the motivations of the group, instead presenting cohousing as product that people choose whether or not to pursue. The third wave of cohousing re-introduces opportunities for the architect and cohouser to interact in the brief development stage as a result of the new support provided by housing associations and charities. This provides

potential for architect to again act as a spatial negotiator – one of many agents involved in defining how a cohousing community can realise social change, rather than just defining the building it is housed within.

### **3.5 Structuration and shared creativity**

Structuration theory proposes agency and structure are manifest as a duality at the point of action. The previous two sections have identified two limitations of structuration in cohousing; the reinforcement of expert/non-expert hierarchies and a lack of appreciation of motivations that drive an individual to act. The duality of these critiques identifies the third limit of spatial agency – a constrained understanding of creativity in Giddens’ approach.

Creativity can be understood as the pinnacle of agency – the ability not just to align your agency to possible actions, but to develop innovative actions based on your own desires and dispositions. Because the citizen is not understood as politically or ethically motivated and perceived as not having expertise, the onus is placed on the architect to provide a means of generating creativity within spatial agency.

Designing ‘for’ presents the architect as the sole creative agent who is able to act autonomously of other. This understanding remains when designing ‘with’, but there is recognition that the architect’s creativity is increased through their access to different stimulus, namely other people. In this approach the citizens are given little opportunity to be creative themselves, as the architect defines the parameters of their deviations.

The designation of the architect as a creative agent is something that the field of architecture has adopted as a means empowering the profession. The architect’s capability to generate ideas and innovation is a large part of their exchange value as a professional, with creativity used to distinguish the architect from other professions involved in the design of buildings such as draftspeople.

Designing ‘from’ is grounded in an understanding that whilst architects are creative agents, it is not a quality exclusive to their expertise. Jonathan Hill presents a case for the creative user as central to architectural practice – the individual seeking to realise “...conscious, evolving deviation from established behaviour” (Hill 2003:27)

Hill is critical of the idea that architecture has co-opted ownership over the creative role in urban development, noting that:

“One of the aims of the architecture profession is to further the idea that only architects create buildings and spaces that deserve the title architecture, suggesting that the user is predictable and has no part in the creation of architecture.”

(Hill 2003:3)

In response to this, he calls for architects to re-engage with others as creative agents in their own right, noting that, "Contrary to expectations, recognizing the user as creative may augment, not diminish, the status and value of architects' skills." (Hill 2003:89). This mirrors some aspects of spatial agency, which agrees that the participation empowers the architect rather than diminishing their power. This assumption is, however, not mirrored in Giddens' theory of structuration, which understands individuals as rational and reflexive practitioners within society. The notion that creativity is a deviation from expected behaviour runs counter to this, as it implies a motivation to seek such deviations that is lacking in Giddens' approach.

The integration of Bourdieu's theories of habitus and field into the hybrid theory of structuration suggests a means for the creativity that emerges through the interactions between architect and co-houser. This is achieved through an understanding that a cohousing group is itself a discourse, generated between the members of the community and the professionals they interact with.

### **Creativity as a discourse**

Robin Evans identifies the creativity potential that can be derived through the embedded interactions between architect and citizen. He suggests that “What connects thinking to imagination, imagination to drawing, drawing to building, and building to our eyes is projection in one guise or another, or processes that we have chosen to model of projection” (Evans 1995:xxx). Evans rejects the representational assumption that these links can be realised through seamless transitions, instead conceptualising projections as inherently unstable and therefore open to affect. Based on this understanding, White argues that creativity is derived through situations that allow the architect and citizen to mutually affect each other, and as a result “...these embodied moments of projection are how creative acts are stimulated.” (White 2017:128).

Bourdieu’s model of ‘fields’ of discourse provides a means of conceptualising how the architect and cohouser can mutually affect each other through the projection from thinking to building. Unlike Giddens’ monolithic understanding of a societal structure, an individual can contribute and be empowered by any number of fields, often simultaneous. This enables a cohousing group to be understood as a field of discourse in its own right, constituted through the actions of the cohousers and professions who seek to define it. A field need not be a grand or longstanding discourse such as architecture, but any social arena in which a set of relations allows individuals to express or reproduce their habitus. As with any field, it is the agents within it who define what the discourse is trying to achieve, but we can assume that a project-specific cohousing field would seek to define ‘how do we want to live together, and how can we achieve this vision?’. Herein lies the opportunity for creativity, as all agents are interacting to define an action that is not pre-determined based on the habitus and agency of the individual agents within the field.

This new field is constituted through the interactions between architect, cohousers and any other professions, and thus all participants have the capability to shape the field and be empowered through it. Agents are differently expert because they bring their own expertise from other fields to this new field

of project specific discourse. Agents are empowered within a discourse because it provides opportunities to interact with different knowledgeable agents, and thus expand their habitus through new experiences. Through this, creativity is generated – the ability to imagine new ideas that the agent could not otherwise conceive and to realise them in ways they could not do alone.

### **Creativity in cohousing**

Based on an understanding of cohousing as a creative discourse, the role of the spatial agent is to create conditions in which this discourse can operate and to create situations where creativity is given the opportunity to flourish. Creativity in this context is the capability for the architect and cohousers to generate ideas, proposals and actions that they could not have achieved in isolation to each other. Creativity here is not understood as an individual genius, but the expansion of the individual's capability to propose through the exposure to and augmentation of others peoples knowledge, ideas and insight.

This develops and creates new forms of practice that move beyond fields of formal or architectonic design, in which the architect is expert and others are unable to contribute. By introducing shared creativity into the spatial agency approach, the interactions between architects and cohousers can mutually enable each other to generate appropriate, innovate responses to the group's collective and individual needs and desires. This doesn't undermine the architects skills of spatial proposition, but augments them with creativity that cohousers also bring to their collaborations.

Through their interactions, the architect is able to expose the cohouser to their knowledge as designers, shifting the expectation of the architect as the sole creative agent by demonstrating how cohousers can benefit from the discourse within the architecture field. Equally, the architect could be exposed to new fields of discourse that cohousers practiced within – class, race, age, profession, hobby, political persuasion, familial role. By encountering and reflecting upon these new stimuli, the collaboration between cohouser and architect enables both parties to not just to choose between various orthodoxies, but to generate

new choices that fulfil the negotiated visions of the community. The hybrid theory of structuration developed in this chapter suggests an expanded definition of agency – not as the capability or choice to act based on available options, but the ability to develop and realise an individually constructed creative vision through interactions with other.

Shared creativity between knowledgeable agents is particularly important within the emerging third wave of cohousing, which like the first wave is seeking to generate new models that address complex societal issues through specific interventions. Cohousing should not be understood as a solution to social issues such as ageing, but a medium through which potential responses can be explored. For the spatial agent, this requires the development of practices that overcome the mutually held understanding of the architect as the sole creative agent, and instead focus on enabling interactions through which both architect and cohouser act creatively, together.

### **3.6 Conclusion: Spatial agency as a practical methodology**

Spatial agency provides an important contribution to the field of architecture, bringing a wide range of socially engaged architectural practices into a unified theoretical concept. It stands not as a toothless critique of the architect's commercial subservience, but as a viable approach for any architect seeking to re-engage with the social and political conditions that the profession is situated within. This chapter has presented how this broad call for 'other ways of doing architecture' can be interpreted in context of cohousing, setting out a hybrid theory of structuration that enables spatial agency to respond to the unique qualities of cohousing. This is realised through an understanding that both architect and cohouser are differently expert, that the architect's role is to support the spatial negotiation of different habitus, and that this can only be achieved by engaging in mutually creative interactions that increase the agency of both architect and cohouser. This expanded definition of spatial agency is grounded in creating the conditions for individuals to realise social change through mutually enabled creativity.

The collaborating I developed with MUCH generated a series of practices through which this expanded definition of spatial agency can be interrogated. By identifying situations that required a new approach to mutual knowledge, negotiated habitus and shared creativity, these practices investigated how the limits to our agency could be overcome, and what subsequent challenges arose as a result. The purpose of this was to demonstrate to what extent spatial agency is an appropriate approach to developing cohousing, and whether agency of architect and cohouser is actually increased through its adoption. The next chapter will set out how my collaboration with MUCH was initiated, developed, recorded and analysed.

## **4 Methodology: Spatial agency and design-research**

The previous chapter explored the concept of spatial agency and developed an expanded interpretation of this approach that reflected the unique characteristics of cohousing. Through collaboration with Manchester Urban Cohousing (MUCH), the second part of this thesis applies and tests this expanded model. This collaboration sought to identify the constraints, contradictions and opportunities of a spatial agency approach when applied to real interactions between myself and members of MUCH. This chapter sets out the methodologies that underpin the development, documentation and analysis of this collaboration.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the methodologies employed in chapters 1-3 of this thesis. Following this, the research methodology of the MUCH collaboration is elaborated on in two parts – the practical methodology and the communicative methodology. The practical methodology established in this chapter is based on a ‘research through design’ approach, in which a contingent, reflexive approach was used to apply and test the application of spatial agency. The communicative methodology is based on an ‘autoethnographic’ approach - a critical, narrative based analysis of interactions in which the researcher is an active participant rather than a disconnected observer (Anderson 2006:378). This approach will be used to document and interrogate the knowledge embedded within the interactions between the architect and cohouser, enabling the collaboration to be analysed within the critical framework of spatial agency. Thereafter, this chapter outlines the context of the MUCH group, including the origins of the group, details about their membership, the aims of the group and their progress to date. The chapter will conclude by providing an overview of the three autoethnographies derived from the MUCH collaboration, each of which will be explored further in the subsequent three chapters, constituting Part Two of this thesis.

## 4.1 Literature review

Before discussing the design-research methodology that underpinned my collaboration with MUCH, I will first briefly review the literature based research methodology utilised in the first three chapters of this thesis. They are based on the analysis of both theoretical and descriptive literature, which are interpreted through a series of critical frameworks to construct a novel theoretical position about the role of the architect in cohousing.

Chapter 1 uses academic literature and urban policy guidance to establish the wider contexts of urban ageing, cohousing and agency. Chapter 2 examines existing literature regarding cohousing through the theoretical framework of participatory architecture. This is supported through the use of literature-based case studies of communities that exemplify the three waves of cohousing. Case studies were examined through a wide range of literature, including scholarly papers, cohousing guides aimed at prospective cohousers, and the self-published websites of various cohousing groups. The one exception to this was the case study of Loppukiri Cohousing, which was informed by conversations I had with residents and their architect Sivén during a visit to the community, recorded through contemporaneously written field notes. Chapter 3 examines the theory of spatial agency in relation to the previously identified qualities of cohousing. This is used to construct an expanded conception of spatial agency underpinned by the in-depth analysis of two theoretical frameworks – Giddens' theory of structuration (1984) and Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977).

Chapters 1-3 identify the limits and opportunities for the architect in cohousing. Whilst the use of existing literature is vital in achieving this, the resultant model is disconnected from the conditions it seeks to affect. Whilst chapter three does propose a possible role for the spatial agency within cohousing, the purely theoretical basis of this proposal leaves it unchallenged by the complexity of real situations and interactions. This is counter to the underlying position within spatial agency – the need for architects to reject autonomy and embrace contingency. In response to this, Part Two of this thesis will test the expanded

model of spatial agency developed in chapters 1-3 through a collaborative design-research methodology.

Although research through practice has a long tradition within the UK within commercial practice, it remains an emerging field in academia (Rust, Mottram, and Till 2007:14, 19). Conceptions of validity and mode of knowledge communication continue to develop within the field of architecture, but “...compared to other practice-based fields of inquiry, the discourse around design research in architecture is still immature.” (Murray 2013:96). In response to this, the remainder of this chapter outlines the practice-based research methodology that informed my collaboration with MUCH - a practical methodology based on ‘research through design’, and a corresponding communicative methodology based on critical autoethnography.

## **4.2 Practical methodology: Research through design**

Collaborating with MUCH offers a unique opportunity to test the limits and opportunities of using spatial agency to support the development of a cohousing group. It demonstrates the gaps, contradictions and opportunities of spatial agency as a theoretical framework, and in doing so suggests how the approach can be adapted. The collaboration with MUCH can be understood as a form of ‘research through practice’, since acting as a spatial agent enabled the generation and communication of knowledge in a way that would not be possible as either an external observer or through retrospective analysis.

Research through design can be described as a process through which issues and questions emerge as a result of a design practice (Murray 2013:96), and are tested through the application of new practices. The practice is therefore both the research methodology and the object of enquiry. The application of practice-led design research is based on the premise that “...there are forms of knowledge peculiar to the awareness and ability of a designer” (Cross 1999:5), which can only be accessed through the undertaking of creative enquiry.

MUCH provided a suitable context in which to explore spatial agency for a number of reasons. Firstly, the group were still at an early stage of development when the collaboration began, and thus there was no onus to produce architectonic form unless doing so enabled the broader development of the group. The focus of the MUCH group was instead to seek creative ideas about how they wanted to grow old together, providing an opportunity to develop novel forms of architectural practice together. Secondly, the group were actively seeking to be innovative and to challenge the mainstream cohousing models. A prime example of this was their decision to collaborate with an architect at such an early stage of development, despite having read guides that suggest traditional, building design roles for the architect. Thirdly, the group were receptive to the academic grounding of the collaboration. Some of the group had worked in academia, and the group as a whole were glad to gain exposure to knowledge that they might otherwise not have had access to.

Whilst the collaboration with MUCH explores the role of the architect, there are notable differences between our relationship and the traditional professional relationship between architect and client. From the outset, MUCH were aware of my role as a researcher. Whilst I hoped that our collaboration would be mutually beneficial, the group recognised the rationale for my actions and offered to support my research in any way possible. The MUCH group did not remunerate me for working with them, nor at any stage did we have a formal, contractual relationship to provide design services.

It is unclear how our interactions might have differed if I was an employed professional. The group were generally grateful for any support that I could offer them, but it is easy to imagine how their responses might have changed had our interactions had financial implications to the group. It was not, however, my aim to simulate the interactions MUCH would have had with a professional architect. Our interactions embraced the freedom provided by my role as a researcher to explore the limits and opportunities of spatial agency. This recognises that any number of variables, including the terms of engagement between MUCH and myself, could have changed the trajectory of

our practices. Despite this, our interactions still provide an insight into the potential role of the spatial agent that would not have been possible had I employed an observational, non-participant role in the MUCH group. The link between our collaboration and its implications for the profession of architecture is discussed in Chapter 8, which highlights opportunities for the professional architect in cohousing and the challenges of employing spatial agency within commercial practice.

### **Contingent practice**

The collaboration with MUCH took a non-linear structure that embraces the transformative potential of ‘contingency’, a key quality of spatial agency. Rendell argues that design-led research should be reflexive, iterative and generative in nature, which conflicts with the traditional, linear research paradigm of question-context-method-dissemination. Rather than a deficiency, this should be seen as an opportunity to develop new approaches that maximise the investigatory potential within specific contexts (Rendell 2004:144).

The collaboration with MUCH sought to test the concept of spatial agency developed in chapter three, and thus focused on practices that were produced ‘from’ a process of reflexive interactions, rather than a pre-determined approach or linear approach (i.e. practices I created to be undertaken ‘for’ or ‘with’ the MUCH members). Figure 17 demonstrates a linear development process in which practices are pre-determined, and thus the knowledge gained from each activity is unable to affect the trajectory of practice.

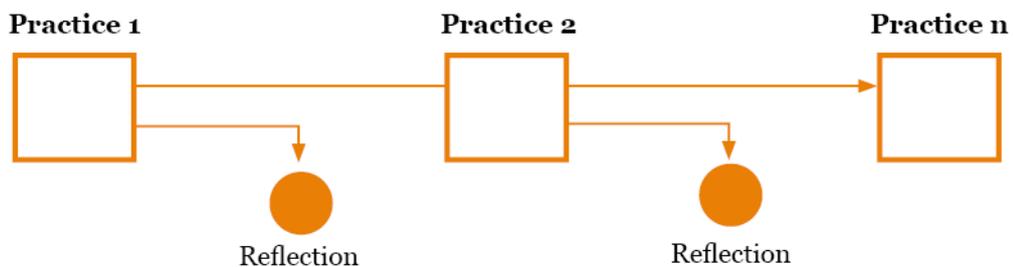


Figure 17: Linear workshop development process  
(Author’s own)

In keeping with the principals of spatial agency, I instead sought to place myself in situations where opportunities could emerge, but equally could not be known in advance. In a practical sense, this involved attending numerous meetings with MUCH in order to identify the contradictions and limits of the group's approach, and thus how spatial agency could contribute to resolving these limits. As a result of this, the research (co-) developed responses on a case-by-case basis to the specific needs of the group and the specific contexts in which their agency was being constrained. Figure 18 shows an example of this process, in which practices developed reflexively in response to the outcomes of previous interactions. The practices are neither pre-defined nor linear, as reflections of one workshop might only be recognised as relevant after other practices take place.

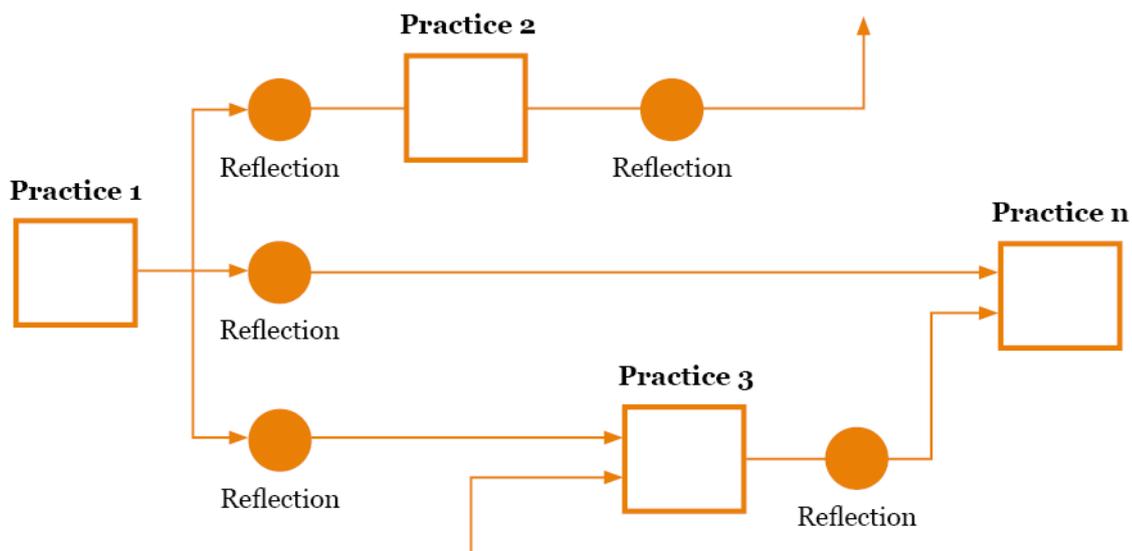


Figure 18: Reflexive workshop development process  
(Author's own)

The collaboration can be understood both as a series of iterative 'practices', and as an enduring practice that spanned the course of our interactions. In keeping with spatial agency, these practices are not understood as limited to the creation of architectonic design. This is not to say that techniques such as drawing, model making and sketches were not employed, but rather the purpose of their creation was not to represent a building but to enable interactions through

which both the cohousers and researcher could increase their agency. The methods developed with MUCH included site visits, training events, group discussions, design charrettes, interactive games and propositional storytelling. I held a focus group with a number of the MUCH members towards the end of our collaboration in order to reflect on the process we had developed.

### **Overview of practices**

In total, the collaboration featured 37 individual practices. Although all contributed to the overall trajectory of the collaboration, not all of these practices are of significant importance to the study to warrant elaboration. As a result, Part Two of this thesis will be structured around 11 of the practices developed over the course of the collaboration<sup>12</sup>.

The design and delivery of these practices took one of three forms: Cohouser-led [C], researcher-led [R], or collaboratively designed [CO]. Each practice was recorded through three different approaches: Field notes [F], audio recording [A] and meeting minutes produced by MUCH [M]. Details of these design and recording approaches are discussed later in this chapter.

The 11 practices discussed in Part Two are summarised below.

1. *Initial meeting* (November 2012)

Roundtable discussion between myself and the early MUCH founders about our respective projects and potential future relationship.

*Discussed in section 5.1 (p.124-126)*

[C] [F]

---

<sup>12</sup> For details about all 37 practices, see Appendix 1: Overview of practices

2. *Design Game* (April 2013)

90 minute design charrette undertaken with 24 people at the MUCH launch event exploring negotiation and the limits of the cohousers creativity.

*Discussed in section 7.1 (p.186-195)*

[CO] [F] [A]

3. Identifying Skills (August 2013)

Group skills audit through which the relationship between the need for knowledge and the fear of expertise as a disempowering force was discussed.

*Discussed in section 5.2 (p.129-136)*

[C] [F] [M]

4. Consensus Decision-Making training (October 2013)

Externally facilitated training session in which the group first adopted a consensus-based approach to collective decisions.

*Discussed in section 6.1 (p.154-155)*

[F]

5. *Storyteller* (January 2014)

Narrative based workshop exploring non-visual representation and scenario testing, which led to the creation of the group's first 'design criteria' document.

*Discussed in section 6.2 (p.156-160) and section 7.2 (p.195-199)*

[R] [F]

6. Albany Road design charrette (February-March 2014)  
Interpretation and revision of design criteria created in the storyteller workshop, through collaborative design exercise, leading to questions about the relationship between ownership and agency.  
*Discussed in section 5.3 (p.136-149)*  
[CO] [F] [A]
  
7. Visit to Lancaster Cohousing, UK (April 2014)  
Field trip to cohousing community with 2 members of MUCH, which led to a discussion about the potential challenges of using consensus decision-making within the design process.  
*Discussed in section 6.3 (p.163-169)*  
[CO] [F]
  
8. Field Trip review (June 2014)  
Workshop exploring MUCH member's perspectives of the field trips, leading to recognition of a series of previously unspoken critiques of existing cohousing communities.  
*Discussed in section 7.3 (p.199-203)*  
[R] [F]
  
9. Elbow Street Design Charrette (June-July 2014)  
Site feasibility study based on a design created from my understanding of the cohousers needs, desires and motives rather direct collaborative design, which explored how I unconsciously placed constraints on my own practices in order to maintain legitimacy.  
*Discussed in section 7.4 (p.203-216)*  
[R] [F] [A]

10. SATCHEL design charrette (October 2014)

Design workshop with members of the SATCHEL (Seniors Accessing Technologies for Co-Housing with E-Learning) research network. SATCHEL is a knowledge exchange network consisting of older people and researchers in Finland, Spain and the UK. This workshop was developed in collaboration with Masters of Architecture (M.Arch) students at Manchester School of Architecture, based on the creative negotiation of design ideas as an alternative to client-side consensus decision-making.

*Discussed in section 6.4 (p.170-182)*

[R] [F]

11. Focus Group (November 2014)

A roundtable discussion between the MUCH members and myself that reflected on the process we had developed and how it had changed our perceptions about cohousing and our own practices<sup>13</sup>.

*Discussed in section 7.4 (p.212-216) and section 8.2 (p.226-228)*

[R] [A]

## **Development of practices**

As previously noted, the design and delivery of our practices took one of three forms: cohouser-led [C], researcher-led [R] or collaborative [CO].

The cohouser-led practices were mostly meetings or workshops that were created to support the group's general progression. These were held as part of a regular monthly meeting, where 2-3 items were discussed to further the various workstreams of the project, such as recruitment, finance, legal, communications and design. In these workshops I was primarily an observer, although contributed at points by answering questions posed by the cohousers, usually in relation to architectural or development matters. I used these workshops to

---

<sup>13</sup> A full transcript of this focus group can be found in Appendix 2

identify situations in which the group's agency was being limited, and thus suggest opportunities to overcome these limitations through future practices.

Researcher-led and collaborative practices were developed in response to these limiting situations. Collaborative practices involved the co-design and co-delivery of workshops and activities. This usually included a smaller planning meeting where the aims of the workshops were discussed, and an appropriate response developed. There was one exception to this – a workshop that I developed in collaboration with a group of M.Arch students at Manchester School of Architecture. In researcher-led practices the aims were collaboratively defined, but the actual workshop was developed and delivered with little input from the cohousers. The autonomous creation of design activities for the cohousers could seem to contradict the principals of spatial agency, which links architectural autonomy to a loss of agency for the user. However, these practices did not conform to this critique because they sought to actively increase the capabilities of the group, and were responsive to the time constraints placed on the group rather than a desire to reduce my exposure to contingency.

### **Recording interactions**

The diversity of practices within our collaboration demanded a number of different approaches to recording our interactions. The recording of our collaborative practices was undertaken through field notes [F], audio recordings [A], and meeting minutes produced by MUCH [M]. The emergent and reflexive nature of our collaboration made it necessary to record a diversity of information, as any activity could have generated insight that would only become pertinent at a later stage.

The practices were primarily recorded through a series of field notes. These notes both described the interactions that took place, and my own reflections of the situations. In most cases they were written as brief notes during the workshop and then elaborated on immediately after the workshop had been completed. These field notes were supported through pictures where possible,

although my role as a facilitator or active participant in many activities made this difficult.

In addition to field notes, I also took audio recording during the focus groups and during the review elements of the three design charrettes, which I later transcribed. I chose not to record audio during all of my interaction with MUCH because I felt uncomfortable keeping a complete facsimile of the process. I was conscious that many cohousing groups endure conflict during these development process, and was concerned that audio records could have been requested as evidence during a wider disagreement.

In addition to my own field notes, I was able to draw upon the documentation of our interactions produced by the MUCH group themselves in the form of the minutes from our meetings. These were particularly useful because they recorded our interactions from the perspective of a MUCH member, and thus offered an alternative insight into the processes we collaborated on. The minutes that MUCH produced were both descriptive and reflexive, documenting both the activities that took place but also summarising the findings and ideas that emerged through these activities.

One of the challenges of the design-research methodology adopted in this study is the articulation of knowledge embedded within these practices and interactions. Whilst spatial agency suggests a practical methodology for architectural practice, a corresponding communicative methodology is required to enable others to interrogate these practices as a form of research. The next section demonstrates how an autoethnographic approach is suitable for communicating the interactions that constituted the collaboration with MUCH.

### **4.3 Communicative methodology: Critical autoethnography**

#### **Challenges of knowledge communication in design-research**

Till highlights the challenges of practice-led research in architecture, particularly the emergent field of research ‘through’ design that this study takes.

“... one has to understand that architecture has its own particular knowledge base and procedures. This particularity does not mean that one should avoid the normal expectations of research, but in fact demands us to define clearly the context, scope and modes of research appropriate to architecture ... Research ‘through’ is probably the least defined and often the most tacit but at the time a key defining aspect of architectural research. It is this area that needs developing most of all.”

(Till 2008:8)

Spatial agency asserts the need for architects to seek ways of expressing their knowledge beyond the creation of built form. By adopting a position that architectural knowledge need not result in a building, the inverse position is that buildings are insufficient in communicating architectural knowledge. This is a position shared by others in the architectural research community. Murray and Rendell both argue that the use of a ‘building’ as the embodiment of architectural knowledge is academically insufficient. They suggest that whilst the designer understands the knowledge manifest through their design, this knowledge can only be abstractly interpreted by others. There is an opacity of the knowledge within the design process, which is often internalised within the designer and limited to external outputs such as sketches and models. In order to make the knowledge within these processes explicit, the design researcher must undertake critical reflection on the architectural process that design knowledge can be shared and disseminated to a wider audience. (Murray 2013:96–97; Rendell 2004:144). It is, therefore, necessary to explore alternative means through which the knowledge of spatial agency can be communicated, and the knowledge embedded within it shared and analysed.

This study seeks to explore the interactions between architect and coouser, with a focus on identifying moments of shared creativity derived from the interactions between MUCH and myself. In order to test the applicability of spatial agency, it is necessary not just to analyse the creative outcomes but to understand how these creative moments were generated and how barriers to this creativity were overcome. The communicative methodology must therefore provide a means of articulating and analysing the interactions between individuals through design to demonstrate the knowledge embedded within the practices and how this knowledge was utilised.

This study adopts the use of autoethnographic accounts to communicate the collaborative processes that we developed. Autoethnography is a form of narrative-based enquiry in which a subject is studied through the real experiences of the author. Although written from an autobiographical orientation, the methodological orientation is ethnographic as it seeks to understand people and the interactions between them (Chang 2008:48). Rather than describing these interactions, autoethnography demands that the author takes a critical position on the experiences they have. This critical analysis should not be static, but allow the author to “...openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork” as their experiences help shape their understanding of the people and contexts they operate within (Anderson 2006:384).

### **Autoethnography and spatial agency**

Although autoethnography is not commonly used in architectural research, it presents an appropriate means of communicating and analysing the collaboration with MUCH, and more broadly in practices adopting a spatial agency approach. It is notable that one of the more visible users of autoethnographic approaches in architecture is Teddy Cruz, an American architect and academic whose practice is cited as an example of spatial agency by Awan, Schneider and Till's work (2011:144–45). Cruz's work explores the links between architectural practice, urban policy and political theory within

communities on the Tijuana-San Diego border. As such, Cruz's practice is defined as much by his interactions with residents, activists and political representatives as it is by the architectural interventions that result from these interactions. Although Cruz does not identify his work as a form of autoethnography by name, his approach bears all the hallmarks of the approach. Cruz writes from an autobiographical perspective in that he documents, analyses and reflects upon experiences he has in situations he seeks out as a researcher and a practitioner. His writing tends to focus on what he experienced, who he spoke to, how they responded, how he acted, and what changed. The narratives he constructs are not descriptive, but instead analytical and reinforced by the projection of a theoretical position through which his observations and actions can be understood. Where Cruz does use more traditional architectural outputs, such as drawings and models, the rationale for decisions is made explicit and thus the knowledge embodied within these architectonic forms can be understood by the reader<sup>14</sup>.

This study is well suited to utilising an autoethnographic approach to communicate the knowledge that is developed through our interaction. My role as an active participant and the chronological nature of the fieldwork both lend themselves to an autoethnographic approach, and the focus on interactions requires a personal account that present how, as a spatial agent, I was affected by those I interacted with. One of the contributions this study makes is to the development of autoethnography as an architectural research approach, to contribute to the gap that Till (2008) identifies in research 'through' design. In addition, this approach offers a unique insight into the cohousing development process, as the majority of the research to date has focused on retrospective case study analysis undertaken by researchers who were not involved in the development process. The result of this is has been a focus on outcomes, rather than the important interactions through which these were created.

---

<sup>14</sup> For two such examples of Cruz' autoethnographic approach, see (Cruz 2005, 2011)

## **Application of an autoethnographic approach with MUCH**

Part Two of this thesis takes the form of three interlinking autoethnographies, each testing a different parameter of spatial agency: Mutual Knowledge, Negotiated Habitus and Shared Creativity. Each of these chapters documents and analyses the practices and interactions between MUCH and myself from the perspective of the researcher. These focus on the observations, decisions, reflections and actions that were undertaken, analysed through the expanded critical framework of spatial agency developed in Chapter Three. The role of MUCH within the collaboration is presented both through my own perceptions and observations, as well as comments and quotes from the cohousers themselves.

The practical methodology developed in this thesis conforms to a number of the key characteristics that apply to autoethnographic research. I was not seeking to be a mere observer of the cohousing group, but an active agent seeking to enact change through their interactions with others. The self-reflexive nature of the autoethnographic approach means that the narratives are predominantly subjective, but this is paired with the views of MUCH members throughout the narrative, thus is not a purely subjective account. Autoethnography embraces this lack of objectivity and instead seeks to record the influence the practitioner has on situations they interact with. The subjective nature of the knowledge provided in autoethnography is mirrored by an understanding that the same knowledge could never be generated through other means (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:274). Without being an active practitioner with MUCH, it would be impossible to examine the how they would respond to collaboration based on spatial agency.

Another aspect of autoethnography is the understanding that an individual's subjective experiences, when critically analysed, have broader relevance that makes unique and valid contributions to wider discourses. As opposed to an objective approach that seeks replicability as a pre-requisite of validity, autoethnography accepts that no social interaction is truly replicable, but that this makes the knowledge that emerges no less valid. If any member of the

MUCH group or the context were different, then the trajectory of their collaboration might have also been different. Regardless of this, these interactions still provided a means of understanding the challenges and opportunities of adopting spatial agency, an understanding that can only be derived in individual, and thus unique situations.

A further opportunity provided by utilising an autoethnographic approach is the inclusion of both observable and hidden interactions between MUCH and myself. A significant portion of the autoethnography will concentrate on shared, observable interactions we had, primarily conversations and workshops. In addition, an autoethnographic approach promotes the inclusion of hidden interactions, such as self-determined expectations of each party or the imagined constraints of a certain situation. For example, the development of trust was never explicitly discussed, but played a large role in determining the early workshop activities that were created. Autoethnography not only enables our interactions to be documented, but also enables the rationale behind my actions and reflections to be evidenced. By making the context of decisions and the thinking behind them clear, these narratives allow the complex challenges facing the spatial agent to be understood in relation to the grounded context they are explored in – a single individual whose habitus and understanding of society influences how they interact with others as a spatial agent.

### **Summary of autoethnographies**

Part Two of this thesis documents three non-linear autoethnographic accounts of the collaboration with MUCH. These chapters each respond to one of the limits that informed the expanded model of spatial agency proposed in Chapter Three. Each chapter begins with the identification of a situation in which the MUCH member's agency was limited, from which a series of practice were developed aiming to explore how these constraints could be overcome and how the group could increase their agency by responding to it differently. The overarching narrative of each chapter is summarised below:

### *Chapter 5: Mutual Knowledge*

The MUCH group's initially adopted a traditional understanding of the architect as a building designer, a position prevalent in literature they used such as *'The Cohousing Toolkit'* (UK Cohousing Network 2012). The MUCH group perceived their relationship with an architect to be oppositional, rather than mutually supportive. The group feared that the architect would use expert knowledge to force them to accept a design that was against their wishes, and thus desired to increase their capability to challenge architectural knowledge. This position presented limits to the architect and cohousers ability to mutually empower the other, as each party can only gain agency to the other party's detriment. In response to this, we developed practices that challenged the hierarchy of knowledge within their interactions, instead focusing on practices that demonstrated the transformative potential in the application of each other's knowledge. This culminated in a design charrette where the qualities of the design were secondary to the demonstration of spatial agency as an empowering medium, and that I could be trusted to expand rather than constrain the MUCH group's agency.

### *Chapter 6: Negotiated Habitus*

The MUCH group initially adopted a process of consensus decision-making as a way of mediating the different and sometimes conflicting spatial desires of the group. This is a commonly promoted technique within the cohousing field, and is based on an expectation that cohousing groups must act as a homogenous, singular client in their interactions with the architect, much like the commercial architect-client relationship. While this approach enabled the group to agree on some commonalities held by the group, it equally limited the opportunity for MUCH to express and accept differences within the group. In response to this, we developed an alternative conception of the 'client' as both multiple and unique, and used architectural practices as a means of accommodating the different positions held by members of MUCH and negotiating them within space. This required interactions with the cohousers aimed at identifying the dispositions and desires held by members of the group, and using spatial knowledge to propose ways through which these can all be accommodated,

rather than heterodox positions being dismissed outright through processes of consensus.

### *Chapter 7: Shared Creativity*

The collaboration was later driven by a desire to produce *shared creativity* as a means of increasing spatial agency. This was in response to the expectation of the client as the creator of a brief, and the architect as a creator of built form. When attempting to create a brief for their community, members of the MUCH group were constrained by a 'sense of limits' – the dependence on past experiences to propose future actions. MUCH members were only confident in expressing ideas which they had seen elsewhere, and thus already had a form of spatial expression. To overcome this sense of limits we developed practices that sought to create a shared discourse, in which the diversity of knowledge and ideas held by the group were able to affect and empower each other, thus pushing out the sense of limits that the group experienced. This process highlighted the sense of limits that affects the architect, particularly with regards to a perceived pressure to generate 'realism' through design. This raised the possibility that to act as a spatial agent, it is also necessary to sometimes meet the expectations of the architect as a creator of form within a broader creative discourse.

As previously noted, these autoethnographies are not presented as a single chronology of the collaboration between MUCH and myself. In response to this, the next section will provide a broader contextual and chronological account of the MUCH group through which the next three chapters can be situated, providing insight into the constitution and aims of the group, as well as the origins of the collaboration.

## **4.4 Manchester Urban Cohousing**

### **Origins of collaboration**

Manchester Urban Cohousing are an older people's cohousing group who are in the planning and project defining stage of their development. MUCH started as

a result of a series of conversations between friends about what they wanted to do in retirement. The members of the group had known each other socially for some time prior to their interest in cohousing, and the group were all either retired or planned to retire in the not too distant future. At my initial meeting with the group, they noted that the group had talked about what they would do when they got older at informal social occasions.

"A number of us had talked about what we want to do in our later years... It was kind of prompted by the experience of my parents who bought a house with my mother's two younger sisters. The four of them lived happily ever after in what we used to call a 'geriatrics commune' in Suffolk. When we would talk about we wanted to do, people would say 'that sounds like a good idea', but we didn't know what we wanted."

(F, November 2012)

Their interest gained traction when some members of the group read an article about cohousing in The Guardian newspaper, specifically about a cohousing conference being organised in London by architects Durrett and McCamant. They noted that the concept matched some of the ideas they had been discussing informally and began to investigate cohousing further.

"We went to the conference, and we talked about it for 2 years. We went to Lancaster (Cohousing community) to look around for a bit before they had moved in, we looked on the websites... We got to the point where we decided if we were going to do it, we needed to get on with it."

(F, November 2012)

After four years of informal discussion between seven friends, they officially started working towards creating a cohousing community in early 2013. At this point, the group had no collective funds, site or plan for their community, but an agreement that they wanted to discover new ways of growing older together.

I was contacted by a member of MUCH in October 2012. One of the seven original members of MUCH worked at Manchester City Council and had connections to members of the Age-Friendly Manchester team through a project they had previously developed together. The MUCH member asked Age-Friendly Manchester for support in establishing their older people's cohousing community, who in turn passed on my details to MUCH.

A meeting was arranged between MUCH and myself in November 2012 for each party to explain their respective projects, and to ascertain how they could support each other. At this time MUCH consisted of seven members, who had not advertised or communicated their project to anyone outside of their social circle.

At the time of this initial meeting, the group had started to transition into a more formal organisation and had begun to speak to a number of professions about their ideas. The group had already spoken to a friend who was a Quantity Surveyor in order to get some rough cost estimates for a speculative brief, which the group suggested had been created based on their initial research from sources such as the UK Cohousing Toolkit and books by Durrett and McCamant (Durrett 2009; Durrett and McCamant 2011)

The group had, following the advice of the UK Cohousing Network Toolkit, decide that they needed to increase their membership, so were in the process of organising three meetings which they would advertise amongst their social networks in order to explain what cohousing was and what they wanted to achieve in order to hopefully attract new members to their group. I was invited to present cohousing case studies and develop an interactive workshop for one of the launch events, which attracted 24 people. After this, MUCH invited me to observe their regular monthly meetings, which led to the gradual development of our collaborative relationship.

## **Group demographics**

The membership of the MUCH group underwent constant change throughout the course of the collaboration. When our collaboration began there were 7 'core' members. This grew to 24 people during the initial introductory events but stabilised at 12 members as the group began their development process. A number of those who attended the introductory sessions, including 3 of the original core members, started their own group for people who were interested in cohousing but felt they were not ready to commit to it right away. Five members of the MUCH group decided to leave the group during the period of our collaboration. Reasons for leaving included a frustration with the pace of development, and feeling that cohousing was not the best way for them to realise their vision.

Of the 12 members, there were two heterosexual couples, two lesbian couples, two divorced females, a single male, and a married female whose partner did not attend meetings. The age of group members at the beginning of their collaboration ranged from mid 50s to late 60s. The majority of the group had either retired, reduced their working hours, or had plans to retire in the next couple of years. All of the group were working or had worked in white collar, professional roles. The majority of the group had backgrounds in the civil service and local government, with a number of the group having worked in community development roles. None of the group came from architectural backgrounds, and none of the group had experience in property development outside of minor domestic works to their own properties. In addition to these paid labours, members of the group also had a number of voluntary or unpaid roles. These included involvement in the CND movement, Woodcraft Folk, anti-climate change groups, and church groups. Two of the group became honorary research fellows at the University of Manchester during the period the collaboration, although neither roles were directly related to cohousing or MUCH.

The members of MUCH come from a number of different neighbourhoods to the south of Manchester, as shown in Figure 19.



Figure 19: Map showing the current residential locations of MUCH members  
(Author's own)

Six members of the group live in Levenshulme, two in Chorlton and two in Whalley Range. These are three of the more affluent areas of Manchester, with the 4<sup>th</sup> (Chorlton), 6<sup>th</sup> (Levenshulme) and 9<sup>th</sup> (Whalley Range) lowest levels of income deprivation out the 32 electoral wards within Manchester (Manchester City Council 2015:7). One member lives in Heaton Moor, which is within Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, but remains part of the wider Manchester conurbation. These members noted that they had strong links to their neighbourhoods having lived in these areas for the majority of their adult lives. The exception to this was one member who lived in the city centre, a decision they had made in order to live in a property with good environmental

credentials. The desire to remain living in the neighbourhoods that individuals lived in caused some friction within the group, as the neighbourhoods of Chorlton/Whalley Range and Levenshulme are located 4 miles apart.

The current housing situations of the group fell into two categories. Nine of the members lived in 3, 4 or 5 bedroom family homes, although none had dependent children still living with them. These properties were semi-detached or terrace dwellings, and all the members who lived in them were owner-occupiers. There was recognition from these members that they were under-occupying these properties. Some of those living in larger houses suggested that the ability for their homes to be available to families could help them gain support from institutions like Manchester City Council. In addition, there are three members of the group who lived in apartments, including one who lived in the city centre. One of this group lived in a rented property but had savings to fund his share of any future cohousing proposal.

The demographic of the MUCH group suggest a wide range of capabilities held by the members. From our first meeting, the group demonstrated professional skills in management, communication and meeting facilitation that would underpin their ability to develop a project as complex as a cohousing community, but lacked the specialist development and design knowledge to deliver the project on their own. Although I was not party to any discussions of personal finances, the tenure and professions held by the group suggest that the group were capable of financing a cohousing community. The group recognised a need to self-fund some professional support through their own savings, but the main development of the community would have to be financed through a development loan that would be repaid by members selling their current properties.

### **Initial aims of MUCH**

The aims of the MUCH group in the early stages of their development were two-fold. Firstly, the group made a conscious effort to become more knowledgeable about what they were embarking upon. This was not limited to just researching

‘cohousing’, but increasing their knowledge of finance, development processes and architecture. Secondly, the group aimed to generate and agree upon a vision for themselves as older people, based on a positive recognition that they could use cohousing as means of increasing their agency, rather than managing a decline. The collaboration we developed can be seen as a response to these aims. The group initially sought to collaborate in order to expand their knowledge about cohousing and architecture, whilst later this relationship shifted towards creating practices through which new ideas and alternative visions of their place in the city could be generated.

MUCH and myself did not sit down to agree on a collaborative programme at the outset of their collaboration. Although it seemed likely they would be in a position to support each other, the dimensions of this were unknown to both parties. We sought instead to base our interactions on emergent situations where the support we could give the other could become apparent over time. Initially, this was limited to occasional questions about building development or planning policy at meetings, but as we progressed we began to identify opportunities for more targeted collaborations. Some of these were identified by members of the MUCH group based on their desired development trajectory, whereas others were identified by myself in response to contradictions between the group’s aims and the processes they were undertaking. As per the contingency based methodology we employed, the workshops were developed reflexively rather than through a linear, pre-determined process. The knowledge, ideas or challenges identified in each interaction were used to shape the thinking of the group and to develop future activities that would be developed.

The collaboration was mostly active between November 2012 and November 2014. There was a natural break in the development process at this point as the group had become increasingly focused on resolving financial and legal matters, whilst I had other academic responsibilities to fulfil. We continued to communicate and support each other in the intervening time, although I was unable to attend meetings as previously. One such interaction took place in

early 2016, where the MUCH group asked for support reviewing a proposed development contract between themselves and a housing association.

### **Current progress**

As of May 2017, the MUCH group are still making progress towards their aims of creating a cohousing community in South Manchester. The group have increased their membership since our collaboration, and have continued to develop their financial and legal models as a group. The group have formed a partnership with a local Housing Association who has offered to help the find, procure and develop a site when they are ready to do so.

The spatial specificity of the MUCH group has proved to be a challenge, as there are limited development opportunities in the neighbourhoods they wish to live in. Furthermore, the group face stiff competition from commercial developers, including those offering for-profit retirement housing. This is a problem that has proved common for UK cohousing groups, particularly those seeking to develop in urban locations<sup>15</sup>. Recognising the separation between political support for cohousing and their own experiences seeking to develop a community, the MUCH group have begun an effort to shape to urban policy within Manchester, both as a means of sharing their experiences and highlight the unique challenges that cohousing groups face.

## **4.5 Conclusion: Research through design**

This chapter has established the suitability of both ‘research through design’ as a means of testing spatial agency, and autoethnography as a means of articulating knowledge that emerges through this process.

The recognition that spatial agency is reliant on practitioners embracing contingency has informed the adoption of a reflexivity approach to practice, which embraces a diverse conception of ‘practice’ that mirrors the suggestion that the spatial agent is more than a building designer. The insufficiency of

---

<sup>15</sup> See Older Women's Cohousing (OWCH), who moved into their urban London cohousing community 18 years after setting up (OWCH 2016b)

architectonic forms as an expression of architectural knowledge led to adoption of a 'research through design' approach. This approach recognises that knowledge of spatial agency is derived from the interactions between individuals, making the knowledge inherently more difficult to interrogate. The adoption of autoethnography enables the communication of these interactions on two levels – an account of the lived experiences of these interactions and the hidden reflections and analysis undertaken by the designer in making sense of these experiences and using them as a rationale for further action. This approach underlines the necessity for me to be an active participant within cohousing rather than as a distanced observer, as it is only through practicing in these situation that these insights can be articulated.

The next three chapters present a series of autoethnographies that document and analyse my collaboration with MUCH, starting with an examination of the expert/non-expert dynamics within cohousing and how these can be overcome through the generation of mutual knowledge.

## **Part Two**

## 5 Mutual Knowledge

The two key aspects of spatial agency are the inclusion of amateurs within architectural practice and a rejection of built form as the only valid expression of these practices (Awan et al. 2011:43). Both of these aspects are linked. It is through the creation of new relationships between architect and citizen that novel, broader applications of architectural knowledge can emerge. This chapter explores the development of the architect-cohouser relationship within my collaboration with MUCH, based on the generation of '*mutual knowledge*'.

Mutual knowledge is realised through the open exchange of knowledge in the spirit of shared enterprise. This rejects the professional norm, in which the stability of the agent's knowledge provides them with the authority to act (Awan et al. 2011:32). Mutual knowledge is based on an understanding that the knowledge of the architect is different to that of the cohousers, but not superior. Understanding individuals as differently knowledgeable has the effect of subverting expert-novice power dynamics and thus creates situations for both architect and cohouser to be empowered by the knowledge that others bring to the collaboration.

This chapter outlines the challenges of developing mutual knowledge, and how MUCH and myself overcame these through a series of practices. This chapter begins by examining the MUCH group's perception that the architect is an expert whose agency must be controlled, and the desire they had to become more knowledgeable about architecture as a means of doing this. This raised the issue of trust between architect and cohouser as a key determinant of mutual knowledge. This chapter shows that the development of trust is dependent not just on the architect ability to demonstrate their probity, but for their ability to show how the spatial agent approach can support cohousing groups to increase their agency. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the dimensions of mistrust perceived by the cohousers, and how this can be overcome through

spatial agency. It concludes by examining a design charrette in which the development of trust and confidence were prioritised.

## **5.1 The architect as a disempowering agent**

From the outset of our collaboration, it was clear that the MUCH group felt conflicted by the need to bring external experts into their project in order to progress. While they recognised that there were skills they would need to access, they were concerned that a reliance on experts would make them vulnerable to coercion by professionals whose expertise they were unable to challenge.

At our initial meeting in November 2012, MUCH and myself discussed what we hoped to learn from each other. The group stated that they contacted me because of their lack of knowledge about architecture as both a creative process and the role of the architect in a practical sense. One of the key aims they noted was to know more about what architects do and how they think.

“This is new for all of us, we want to know all the tricks of the trade... the vocabulary you use”

(F, November 2012)

Rather than simply gaining an understanding of what an architect does, the group's desire to learn about the ‘tricks’ highlighted the group's main concern - the ability to be critical of their eventual architect. Their interpretation of the architect-cohouser relationship was one characterised by unequal power held by the architect, despite their eventual role as their employer. The determinant of this was the architect’s discursive knowledge – an expertise that the cohousers did not have, but also did not *understand*. A member of the group compared their situation to a more traditional development in which the client was a professional, suggesting that the professional client would have more experience, and thus be able to challenge the architect’s actions. The rationale they offered for wanting to understand the ‘tricks of the trade’ was a desire to retain their agency within the design process. Their goal was to avoid feeling pressured into accepting proposals that their architect presented, but that they

disagreed with. Although we did not discuss this at the meeting, I later reflected that this implies dishonesty on the part of the architect – an expectation of selfishness to further the architect’s own goals despite the wishes of the cohousers.

The idea of the architect as an oppositional force was a position partially derived from the group's initial research into cohousing. Some of the group had attended a cohousing conference in 2010 which featured a presentation from American cohousing architect Kathryn McCamant. A member of MUCH summarised the message of this presentation as follows:

“...if you give the power over to the architect, you will get what they want. You won’t get what you want, they can't read your mind.”

(F, November 2012)

This quote identifies two positions that the group had adopted. First, the suggestion an architect wants to get something that the client does not. This seemingly demonstrates a breakdown in the model of professionalism i.e. the moral and ethical expectation that the professional architect selflessly serves those who employ them. Second, an understanding that giving power to the architect means you will not get what you want, or alternatively that taking power from the architect will get you what you want. Both of these present agency as a finite resource – either the architect *or* the cohousers is powerful and gets what they want.

It should be noted that architects were not alone in this critique of power, as the group noted similar concerns about other professionals such as builders and developers. This suggests that it was not architects specifically they are distrusting of, but those whose motives were unknown. Despite this, I recognised that their concerns regarding the architect were acute because they felt that the architect was able to alter their vision. The group were particularly concerned with a scenario in which they felt unable to challenge a design proposal, and thus be left with a community that did not achieve the

experiences they desired. This suggested that the architect's creative role amplified their concerns about expertise, a worry grounded in a desire to retain agency over their community.

This meeting demonstrated a negative perception of architectural knowledge. Whilst the MUCH group recognised that architectural knowledge was necessary to fulfil their goals, it had a greater ability to disempower. With this perspective, it was understandable that the group's response was a desire to gain architectural knowledge – and thus be able to counter the agency of the architect.

### **Mutual knowledge and the necessity of trust**

A key observation from this initial meeting was the group's limited appreciation of their own knowledge, and the contribution it could make in their relationship with an architect. The focus at this stage was the accumulation of the architect's knowledge, rather than the promotion of their own ideas, insights and experiences. Whilst the architect as a professional was respected for the knowledge and contribution they could make, this was constrained by a lack of trust in the motives that underpinned architectural practice.

This identifies a situation in which the mutual knowledge between architect and cohouser would be necessary for both to increase their agency. This initial meeting demonstrated that the MUCH group recognise the architect's capability to act based on their specialist expertise, but have less confidence that their own knowledge could affect change within the design process. This is not to say that they do not value the contribution they could make to the architect, but rather than they do not trust the architect to value it. The reason for this is twofold. First, the group's understanding of the architect is that of the traditional building designer, and thus share the critique put forward in spatial agency that the architect is an autonomous expert whose knowledge is limited to making architectural products. Second, the architect as a professional cannot, from their perspective, be separated from their ability to profit from their knowledge. The MUCH group's mistrust is grounded in the knowledge that the financial

imperatives of architectural practice will affect their actions – be that to reduce the hours spent on their project to a minimum, or to produce a building that provides them with professional esteem in order to gain further work, rather than meet the needs of the coholders. Whilst the architect’s autonomy and constraints of professional practice are conflicting concepts, from the perspective of the coholder they both result in a situation in which the architect’s actions are unresponsive to their needs. A key conclusion, therefore, is that generating trust between coholder and architect can be seen as a vital precursor to the production of mutual knowledge.

The relationship between knowledge and trust has been identified by Giddens (1990) who argues that the acceptance and confidence people give other people’s knowledge is based on, “...a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principals (technical knowledge).” (Giddens 1990:35). The initial meeting between MUCH and myself suggested that both characteristics are necessary for generating trust. MUCH had a mistrust of the architect because of the architect’s presumed probity (honesty, decency, morals) as opposed to their technical knowledge, but we must consider the two issues are interrelated. They questioned the probity of the architect because they felt unable to ascertain the correctness of the architect’s abstract principals, and wanted to resolve this by gaining knowledge of these principals as a way of testing the probity of the architect.

This initial meeting demonstrated the need for our collaboration to be grounded in the premise that MUCH and myself have different forms of knowledge that are equally useful, and that can mutually empower each other to increase our agency. In order to achieve this, our interactions would need to find ways of generating trust – both to demonstrate my own probity as an individual and the ability of the architectural concepts within spatial agency to empower them.

My role as a researcher provided a different starting point for our relationship than other architects might be afforded. As opposed to other professionals with discursive knowledge they might interact with, I was not burdened by any

financial imperative that might cause me to act with dishonesty – I would have nothing to gain from deceiving the group as to what they could or could not achieve. In addition, I made it clear at this meeting that I too was critical of traditional architectural practices and was sympathetic to their concerns. Whilst our collaboration was still emerging, I felt the cohousers did not see me as oppositional to them in the same way that they assumed a professional architect would be. This provided an opportunity to develop a new relationship unburdened by an expectation of conflict. Despite this, I was conscious that our future collaborations, particular those that fall outside the cohousing norms, would require the group to trust that their knowledge was being valued. Whilst I respected their desire to gain more architectural knowledge to counter the agency of the architect, I also felt that mutual knowledge would provide a more productive way of generating the agency to produce, rather than the agency to constrain the architect. Achieving this would be reliant on the MUCH group trusting that their knowledge is valued within this process, both on an interpersonal and methodological level. This would become an on-going determinant of my interactions with MUCH throughout our collaboration.

### **Exploring the alternative definitions of expertise**

At the conclusion of the meeting, I agreed to share my knowledge about architecture with the MUCH group, although at this point we did not agree how this would be realised. Whilst I noted that exposure to architectural knowledge was something the group desired and that I could offer to the group, I felt that the assimilation of the architect's knowledge would be insufficient in reaching their goal of creating a community that they actually wanted. The group had a negative perspective on their own agency – the desire to have the ability to stop the architect from designing something which they disliked – rather than a positive one of helping the architect design what they wanted. In order for this positive conception of agency to be realised, it was necessary for their own knowledge to be shared, and thus a mutual knowledge between myself and cohousers to be created.

In order to define a design practice that promotes mutually affective knowledge between the cohousers and myself, it was necessary to investigate how the cohousers consider their own knowledge. This was a perspective shared by the MUCH group for more grounded reasons, as it was necessary to identify what each member could contribute to the on-going progress of the group. In response to this, two MUCH members designed a 'knowledge and skills' workshop that aimed to help the group to identify and value the knowledge they already present within the group.

## **5.2 Examining the perceived value of knowledge**

Following the launch of the project, the MUCH group began meeting monthly for 3-5 hour 'general meetings'. At this stage, I was attending these meeting as an observer, offering insight when prompted. The focus at this stage was on logistics, such as establishing protocols regarding meeting facilitation, record keeping and recruiting new members. These tasks, whilst necessary, provided little opportunity for the group to share much about themselves with each other, and I felt at this point that I knew remarkably little about those who I was collaborating with. This was a view shared by some MUCH members, who proposed that a portion of the next meeting be given over to sharing the skills and knowledge each of us brings to the project, and to create time for us to just talk to each other over tea.

Two members of the group offered to design a workshop for the August 2013 meeting, with the aim of learning the knowledge already present within the group. This would allow the group to discuss what expertise they would bring into their project, and to divide the labour of the various tasks amongst the members. I did not contribute to the design or running of this workshop because I had originally thought the workshop would only be relevant to the task of dividing labour amongst the group, and it was only during the workshop that the wider relevance of the workshop in relation to expertise and mutual knowledge became apparent.

This workshop was notable because it was the first time the group had been able to share their own understanding of the knowledge they held, thus highlighting the knowledge that the cohousers valued. Through the inclusion of time for informal conversation at the end of the workshop, this meeting also provided an opportunity for me to learn about knowledge the MUCH members placed less value in – aspects of themselves that I found very interesting, but that they failed to share with the group at the previous workshop.

**The self-identification of knowledge**

The ‘Identifying Skills’ workshop (August 2013) was a 30-minute activity. The members of MUCH in attendance, along with myself, were asked to split into groups of 3 or 4, and discuss with each other the ‘personal attributes, experiences, skills and knowledge’ that we felt had value to the group. One member of each group would make Post-it notes to keep track of the skills and knowledge raised. The group would reconvene after 15 minutes to categorise and discuss the knowledge within the group.

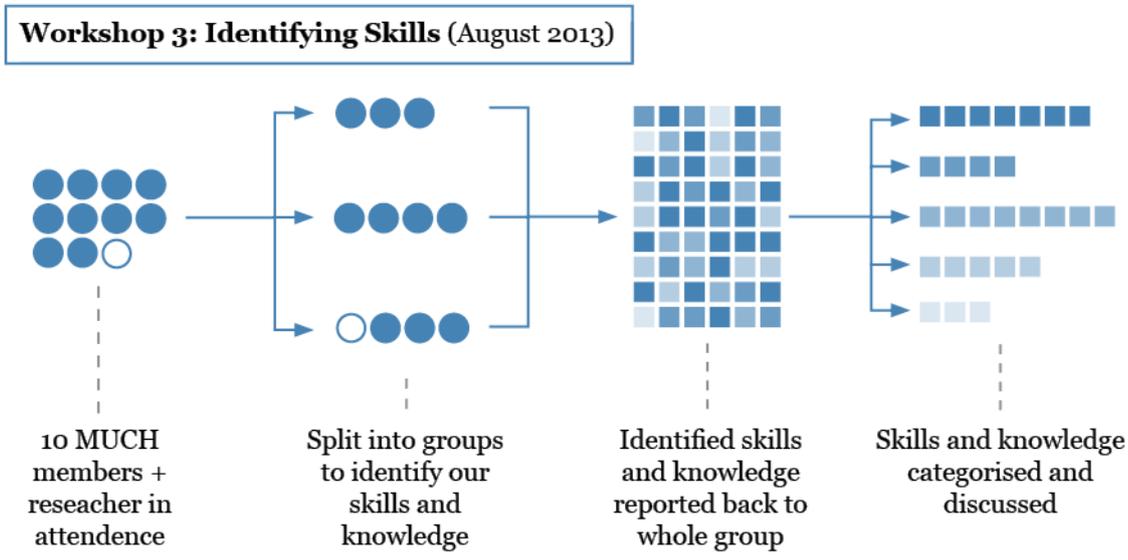


Figure 20: Diagram of Identifying Skills workshop (Author’s own)

In my group, the discussion focused on work skills, particularly in relation to previous employment or volunteering roles. Skills highlighted in our discussion

included project management, creating funding bids, meeting facilitation and IT. When asked, I offered a similar self-reflection of my past activities as a student, architectural assistant and researcher, identifying my skills as a designer and my knowledge of participatory design methods, sustainable building technologies and research.

The group reconvened after these short discussions and the MUCH member who facilitated the session grouping Post-it notes on the wall into broad categories ('management', 'finance' 'facilitation', 'communications', 'design' and 'other'). Other groups had identified similar sets of skills linked to employed labour, although there were some other skills that were notable – such as the ability to cook for large groups of people, to grow vegetables and personal qualities such as being a good listener.

#### **Four aspects of knowledge**

Despite the aim of undertaking a 'skills and knowledge review', it was notable that as a group we were unable to disassociate *knowledge* from *skills* in this workshop. In the majority of cases, the skills identified were manifestations of knowledge in the performance of labour. Giddens describes knowledge as having four aspects, which provides insight as to why the group were comfortable sharing some elements of their knowledge but not others:

“(1) The means of access actors have to knowledge in virtue of their social location;

(2) the modes of articulation of knowledge;

(3) circumstances relating to the validity of the belief-claims taken as ‘knowledge’;

(4) factors to do with the means of dissemination of available knowledge.”

(Giddens 1984:91)

I reflected that the knowledge that MUCH members and myself communicated in this workshop conformed to these four aspects of knowledge. By focusing on professional skills, we identified knowledge in ourselves that had a means of access through education, a mode of articulated through the discourses of our professions, a validity because this knowledge had an the exchange value through salaried employment, and a means of dissemination through our actions as workers and employees.

I reflected that this portion of the workshop had not really allowed me to gain a better understanding of the knowledge held by the other MUCH members. Although I had learned that members of the group ran meetings and submitted bids for projects, I still had little understanding of the fields in which they operated. Knowing that members of the group were good facilitators was interesting, but knowing that some had been facilitators on community development projects (as some of the group had) exposed an expertise that would change how I approached our relationship. Equally, this phase of the workshop did not provide an opportunity for knowledge that lacked the means of articulation, validity and dissemination to be shared them with the group.

### **Alternative recognition of knowledge in informal settings**

Following the exercise, we took a tea break before concluding the meeting with other items that were on the group’s agenda. I engaged in polite conversation

about what everyone was doing over the weekend, in which people identified a variety of activities (caring for relatives), hobbies (cold water swimming, jewellery crafting, holidays) and group memberships (CND, the Labour Party and Woodcraft Folk). These, in turn, highlighted knowledge within the group that was not raised in the previous workshop – experience in community development, within political contexts, of negotiation and cooperation, of the arts and culture, of supporting others.

Without the formality of the previous workshop, we were able to share a broader understanding of the knowledge we hold, unburdened by the need to demonstrate the perceived value of our knowledge. Whilst in the previous workshop the focus had been on the self-selecting knowledge that we felt could help the group, there was no such constraint to these conversations. The result was that people shared what they did and what they knew, regardless of the value they perceived this knowledge to have.

The importance of our discussion during the informal portions of this meeting were noted by others in the group, and were subsequently recorded in the minutes of the meeting;

“Since this session, some people had thought about skills they have but didn’t think to raise in the meeting (such as experience of caring and how that provides a level of design knowledge).”

(Minutes from August 2013 MUCH meeting)

The individual who provided care for a relative is undoubtedly knowledgeable, and this knowledge could certainly contribute to the creation of both policy and design in relation to the issue of the long-term care needs of the residents, or the burden that care places on the carer. Despite this, the individual did not see their knowledge of being a carer as having validity during the formal workshop. It was an activity that they were not paid to do, nor formally qualified to do, and thus it held less weight in their mind than the management skills for which they were formally trained and remunerated.

The different types of knowledge shared in both the formal and informal elements of this meeting are indicative of the importance of trust. The MUCH group were still relatively new, leading to individuals being guarded about the knowledge they felt able to share with each other. This can be seen as a product of the trust within the group's interactions, which at this stage was still developing. In the formal workshop, sharing knowledge with the group presented an element of risk. There was uncertainty as to whether the group would accept their knowledge as valuable, judge them for sharing it, or challenge the validity of their claims. I found myself being guarded in the formal workshop because I was conscious not to jeopardise my relationship with the group, or undermine their confidence by sharing knowledge that they might see no value in. In the informal element of the workshop, these concerns were somewhat alleviated – as people shared more about themselves, I too felt better able to share things about myself.

From a design perspective, the chance to learn more about the MUCH group was an opportunity not afforded to many architects. I was able to begin to understand the ethical, political and social context of the MUCH group, as well as identify how members of the group could make different contributions to the design of the community. This workshop enabled me to start imagining how cohousing could serve the unique interests within the community, rather than a default perspective that the group might adapt to the qualities of cohousing. By generating trust, it became possible to conceive how a mutual knowledge might emerge. I began to see how their knowledge could be of value to my own, and visa-versa.

### **Developing the 'confidence to contribute'**

There was a short discussion at the end of the workshop, in which the group identified the gaps in their knowledge. Notably, the group perceived that they had identified many 'people' skills but that the group had limited 'professional' skills. I felt that the majority of skills identified were professional, but that the professions the group were part of relied heavily on interpersonal skills.

Regardless, the group identified the need to bring other experts into their process, which led to a discussion as to how and when this should occur. This made explicit my observation from the initial meeting – the importance of trust in the architect-cohouser relationship. The minutes of the meeting note that;

“... questions of how the group could work with other experts was raised. How could the group ensure they trust and respect other professions which they have less experience in? It was suggested that our learning needs need to be based on giving us the ‘confidence to contribute’.”

(Minutes from August 2013 MUCH meeting)

The desired ‘confidence to contribute’ demonstrated a view that the group are capable of participating in the work of professionals, but that they feel unable to do so because of the relationship dynamics they expect to experience. The confidence to contribute can alternatively be understood as a trust that the professional will value their knowledge and treat it in a non-judgmental manner.

In the September 2013 monthly general meeting, the group decided to start developing a design brief. Up to this point, the group had been focusing on how to become an effective, legally constituted working group, rather than exploring the social and architectural qualities of their community. It was noted that a brief would enable the group to progress the other work-streams in development, as it would support MUCH to recruit new members, develop financial projections and find a suitable site.

I felt that the development of a brief would be a good opportunity to start generating the ‘confidence to contribute’, and proposed that we develop this through a design charrette, in which myself and 3 of the MUCH group work together to draw up a speculative cohousing community. This would fulfil my promise to share with the group the processes that underpin the design of the community, but also provide a situation in which I could demonstrate that

architectural knowledge can enable their own knowledge to be expressed in form, thus challenging the oppositional view of the architect-cohouser expressed at the very start of our collaboration. Through this, I felt able to demonstrate the probity both of myself as a collaborator, and of spatial agency as an empowering process.

### **5.3 Using design as a means of developing trust**

#### **De-mystifying the architect through collaboration**

As the MUCH group progressed through their overall development plan, a decision was made to establish a 'Site and Design' sub-group, which consisted of three members seeking to aid the group in developing a brief, finding and assessing possible sites, and vetting professionals such as architects. The first two of these tasks – developing a brief and finding a site, were seen as inextricably linked. The group were unsure whether they should define what they wanted to build and then try to find a site that matched it or to find a site they could afford and see how they would be able to use it. The group felt that the answer lay somewhere in-between these positions, but concluded that the only way they would be able to prepare for either eventuality was through practice. I offered to support the 'site and design' subgroup to develop a workshop in which we would develop a brief and a design in response to a specific site. Following this, we would present the design to the full MUCH membership in order to assess whether the design fulfilled the desires of the group, and if not what amendments to the working brief would be needed. Our design charrette took place in February 2014, with the review meeting taking place one month later.

**Workshop 6: Albany Road design charrette (February-March 2014)**

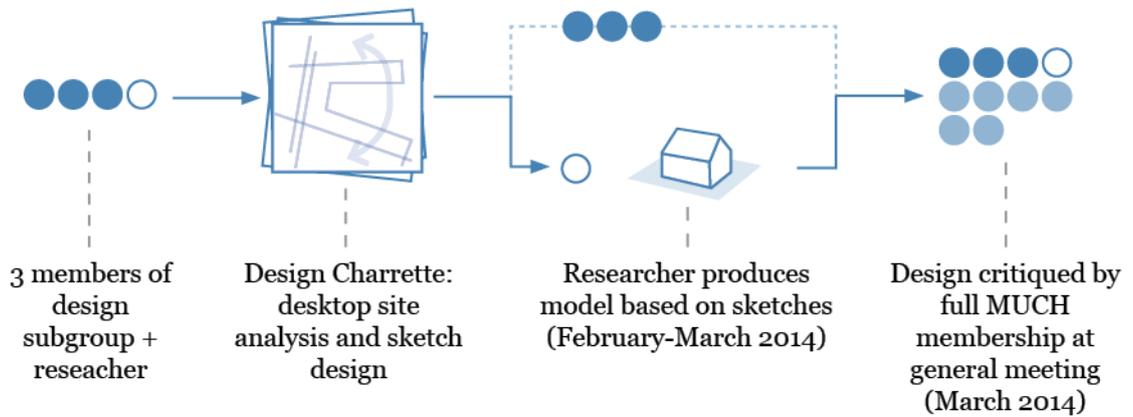


Figure 21: Diagram of Albany Road design charrette (Author's own)

At this stage, the MUCH group had already developed a rough brief for a cohousing community, which had been developed prior to the commencement of our collaboration. The brief consisted of a list of spaces that matched those presented in many of the cohousing guides and online resources; conventions such as 20-30 dwellings, a common dining room and kitchen, storage, shared garden. The brief was treated by the group as a placeholder that allowed them to explain to others what cohousing was, but was not one that the group had to this point spent time discussing. We would use this as a broad starting point for our workshop, using our workshop to test and elaborate on the assumptions presented in the generic cohousing model.

The design subgroup and I held our design charrette over a single 3 hour period, during which time we would undertake a desktop study, examine the opportunities to develop the site and draw up some initial sketch plans. We also agreed that in order to share the design with the rest of the MUCH membership I would make a physical model of the design, which I would undertake in my own time after the meeting.

Prior to the workshop, I selected a site for our design charrette. I picked a site on Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, which had recently been developed as a

McCarthy and Stone retirement housing scheme. This site was chosen because the size of the development that had been built was similar to the current MUCH brief. This was in response to an on-going concern within the MUCH group about the viability of their development in the relatively expensive South Manchester locations they desired to live in. I felt that by showing them that someone had viably developed the site in recent years, they might feel that their proposal was also realistic. I also hoped it would demonstrate the differences between the socially focused desires of the MUCH group in comparison to the profit-driven development which had been built.

The design charrette demonstrated a number of situations where the mutual knowledge between myself and the cohousers was able to influence our actions. By taking a view that my own knowledge and that of the cohousers was different but equally valid, this workshop shows the value in spatial agency as a means of generating ideas. Equally, the approach we took and the context of our practice also led to situations where I held back from questioning the knowledge of the cohousers for fear of disempowering them. Whilst in some senses this produced a final design that I had reservations over, it equally acted as a means of generating trust between myself and the MUCH members, which would prove to benefit of our collaboration in the future.

### **Stage one: Site analysis**

We began with a desktop analysis of the site. As requested by the group, I explained the common techniques that an architect would deploy when presented with a new site for the first time. I started to draw basic site analysis diagram (Figure 22), indicating the sun path, identifying site access points, highlighting potential sources of noise nearby, and demonstrating how the site was overlooked/overshadowed by neighbouring buildings.

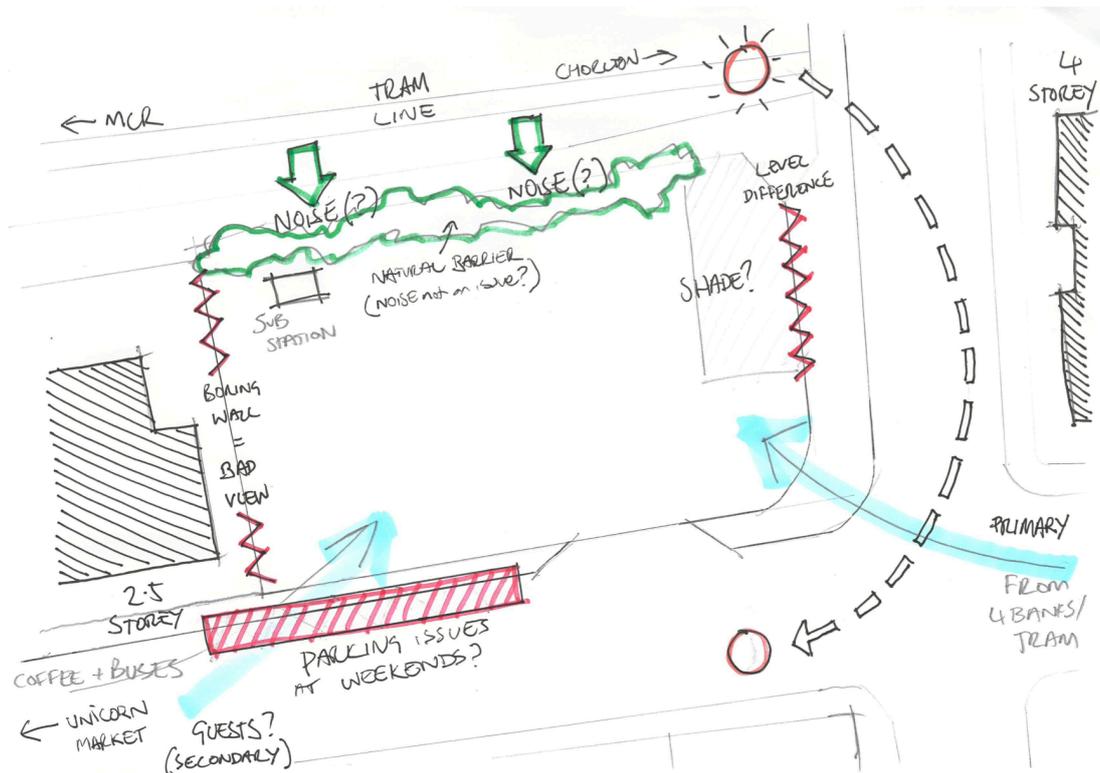


Figure 22: Site analysis sketch from Albany Road workshop  
(Author's own, February 2014)

At this point, the MUCH members began offering their own suggestions based off their own knowledge of the neighbourhood and issues of urban living in general. One member of the group identified a problem parking on the road in this area due to a popular local supermarket that only has a small car park. Although a minor point, this would later have a large effect on the design we produced, as it put a greater emphasis on providing parking for both residents and visitors. One member of the group also challenged my assumption about the tram-line that formed the eastern boundary of the site.

“When you say noise, I don't think that's right. The tram is actually very quite, and with the trees even less so. I've been to friends gardens that back onto the tram, it's not a problem.”

(F, February 2014)

Although limited, these examples demonstrate how mutual knowledge was generated by opening up my own knowledge to critique. The knowledge they offered empowered me to generate a better analysis of the site than I could have done alone, whilst the process I facilitated enabled the cohousers knowledge to have form that it would otherwise lack. In addition, this collaborative site analysis helped to generate trust between myself and cohousers. The MUCH members could see that their knowledge had affected the process we had undertaken and that their knowledge was not dismissed as invalid by virtue of the anecdotal qualities it was derived from.

### **Stage two: Sharing architectural ideas**

Following our mutually developed understanding of the site, we started to elaborate on the prosaic brief we had been given, and create some sketches and ideas. The pre-existing brief simply called for a communal garden, the qualities of which were undefined. Our site analysis showed that this would be one of the main challenges of our design, as the site was quite compact and had poor solar access due to large proximate buildings and a need to build upwards in order to fit the required number of dwellings.

I asked the group what the purpose of the communal garden was. One of the group argued that the garden should be a unifying element that everyone could share, and act as the main circulation space within the community. She wanted us to avoid a design based on long corridors, which she argued would make the design feel like an 'old people's home'. Although there was some discussion about the positives of having indoor, covered circulation routes, the group agreed that having to go outside to see friends or use the common facilities would prevent them from becoming institutionalised. The garden we identified therefore needed to respond to two qualities – the poor solar access to the site, and the desire for the outdoor space to bring the community together.

I started by sketching a few different building footprints that could enable a shared garden (courtyard, horseshoe etc.) when one of the MUCH members mentioned a TV show they had previously watched which featured a design

which she thought responded to challenges similar to those we faced. By chance two of the group, as well as myself, had also watched the programme – Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s travel documentary ‘*Scandimania*’ (2014). The show featured a profile of architect Bjarke Ingles of BIG and featured a tour of ‘8 House’ in Copenhagen, a project his practice had developed in 2011. One of the features of the 8 House is a tapered form of the apartment blocks to allow views and solar ingress from the south. This solution overlapped both with our initial site analysis, which identified the site as east-west facing, and the groups professed desire for a shared, central outdoor space. One of the group suggested adopting this form as the basis of our plan.



Figure 23: Bjarke Ingles and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall touring 8-House on 'Scandimania' (Image: Ferguson 2014)



Figure 24: 8 House in Copenhagen, Denmark  
(Image: Lindhe 2010)

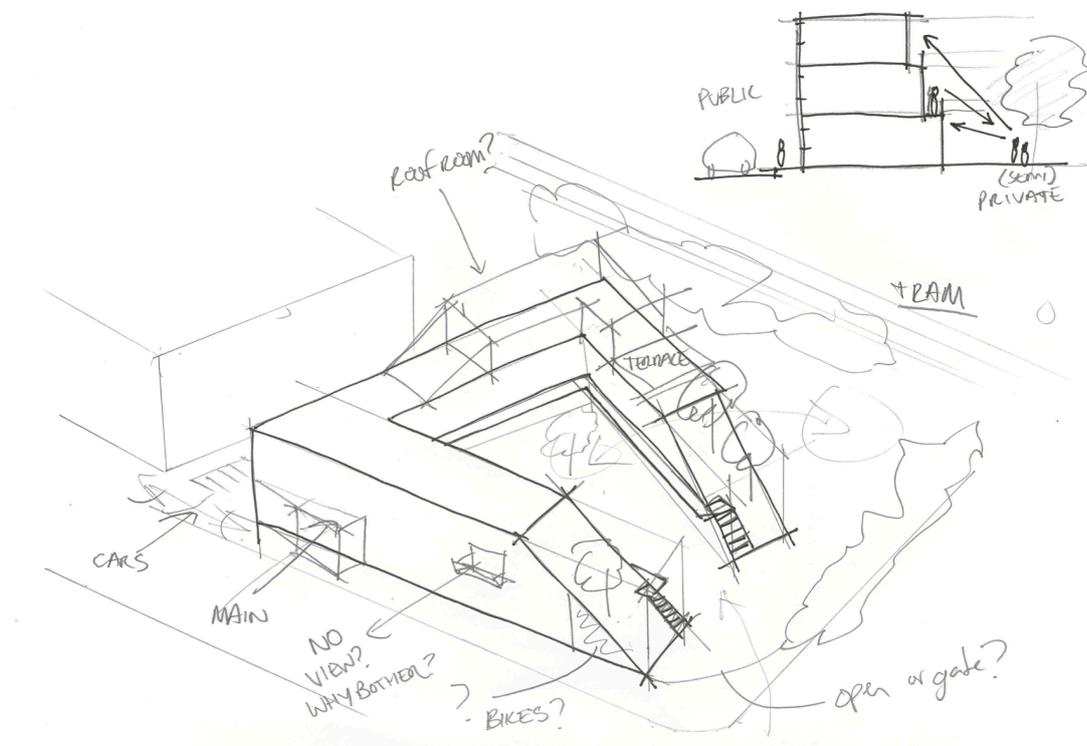


Figure 25: Sketches from Albany Road design workshop  
(Authors own, February 2014)

Whilst I had reservations about the applicability of the case study to the scale of plot we were working to, I felt it would be detrimental to our collaboration to undermine their proposal. To reject or question their proposal would be seen as an attempt to undermine the knowledge they had offered, and therefore disempower them. I felt at this stage of our collaboration we had not developed enough mutual trust to suggest a different approach that I thought would be more suitable, as any intervention would be seen as the enforcement of a knowledge hierarchy, in which my expertise was overriding their own knowledge.

The use of a TV show as a case study is notable because it demonstrates how the MUCH members gain and apply knowledge about architecture, a discourse in which they have not had formal training or experience. *Scandimania* provided the MUCH members with a means of accessing architectural knowledge that was devoid of complex discursive language, but which still offered a critical perspective that they would otherwise be inaccessible. This knowledge was also given validity because it was being communicated by Ingles, who the group understood to be a reliable expert.

As interesting as it was that the group identified the way that the 8 House case study might resolve the issue of solar geometry, it was equally interesting that the group ignored the other part of the case study presented on the show – the creation of a shared outdoor street that spiralled up the inside of the courtyard, linking all the dwellings and provided the main circulation and social space on the development. Within the show, this street was a prominent feature, including interviews with residents who described their positive experiences of it, and Ingels identifying the importance of the shared street in making the community sociable. Despite this, the group did not raise this concept in the discussion, and when prompted about this part of the case study the group seemed ambivalent. When we later came to think about how the apartments would be linked, the group described a similar system to that identified in the 8 House. The group desires to have a variety of small, informal social spaces at regular intervals, universal access to all apartments so there wasn't two distinct

'blocks', and wide paths which allowed things to occur, rather than just an access corridor/deck.

Whilst the MUCH members evidently gained knowledge from watching *Scandimania*, it is notable that they felt more comfortable relaying the objective knowledge they gained about solar geometry rather than the subjective idea that certain designs enable social interactions. It is rational that a tapered design might enable more sunlight into a space. For the MUCH members, there is a validity to this knowledge as it presents logical, mathematical solution which operates under rules which they are knowledgeable of – how the sun moves, and how shadows are made. 8 House represents a physical solution to a physical problem – how to give the centre of the plot more access to sunlight.

The groups proposal of a circulation concept very similar to that of the 8 House whilst not citing it directly suggests that they did not perceive their knowledge of this part of the case study to be as valid. The way that the design enables social interaction is a much more complex issue than the knowledge of solar geometry, and is part of a discourse that the cohousers are less experienced. Were anyone to challenge their knowledge about the solar geometry, the cohousers would feel confident in the validity of their knowledge. On the other hand, if someone were to challenge their knowledge about how design enables social interaction, they would feel less capable of standing their ground.

The example of the 8 House demonstrates the hierarchy that still existed between MUCH members and myself. This hierarchy is determined by a lack of trust; the fear that I could undermine their proposal, or question their knowledge in front of their peers. Overcoming this hierarchy could only be achieved if the MUCH group became experts in architecture, or if the were able to trust in my own probity to embrace and value their knowledge and perspectives. Adopting the concept of a tapering design was a way for me to achieve this, showing that their knowledge was valid and would be taken seriously and that my role was not to tell them they were wrong. At this stage, it was more beneficial to our collaboration to develop trust in our process and

between us as collaborators, as opposed to developing a design that I felt would respond to their desires in a more effective way.

### **Design critique as a barrier to mutual knowledge**

During the charrette, we developed our design through conversation, whilst I sketched up a number of plans and diagrams as we progressed. At the conclusion of the meeting we had explored most of the aspects in the brief we were testing, but we lacked a means of communicating them to the group at a later meeting. I offered to work up the diagrams into a more coherent design by myself before the next meeting, as I was conscious that the MUCH members had other tasks to be developing.

I decided to make a model as a means of communicating the design we had developed to the rest of the group. Not only did I feel that a model would be an accessible way of sharing the design with the group, I also felt that it was important to produce a tactile, physical expression of the group's agency. To date the group had been working primarily on generating policy, agreeing on processes and exploring legal structures for the group. Whilst they had made a lot of progress, at the meetings I got the sense that they found this to be a draining because they had little to show for their efforts. I felt making a model might provide a boost to the group and an object through which they could see the progress they were making.



Figure 26: Albany Road model  
(Author's own)

In making this model, I had to elaborate on the sketches we had developed, particularly in generating aesthetic forms. Aesthetics had been something that the group had struggled to discuss at previous meetings. In defining their values, the group debated an aspiration that the community should be 'both useful and beautiful' for some time without resolution, as differing views on the subject were debated. I thought that the review of this design would be an opportunity to explore this further, and decided to propose a non-traditional fenestration style in order to provoke the group into responding.

Myself and the members of the site and design subgroup presented the sketches and model to the rest of the MUCH group at a subsequent general meeting. As I had developed the model, I ended up leading the presentation. On reflection, this was a wasted opportunity to empower those who developed the workshop with me, and although it was not my intention this probably reinforced the hierarchy between myself as the 'expert' and the rest of the group as 'participants'.

After the presentation, we opened up the floor for questions and comments and asked the group to identify aspects of the design that they thought needed more consideration in order to create a revised set of design criteria. In retrospect, this approach was insufficient in allowing mutual knowledge to be formed. The arena of our interaction was a traditional architecture ‘crit’, which was something that I was comfortable and knowledgeable of, but that the rest of the group had no previous exposure to. Whilst I would have been happy to receive criticism (and actively encouraged it), a cohouser with a less knowledge of how critique is used in architecture would presumably not wish to cause offence to myself, or their fellow cohousers who helped create the design. The group offered little criticism and purported to be pleased with the design. I found this to be unfortunate, as criticism would have provided impetus for further collaborations. Even the façade, which was specifically chosen because I thought it might encourage debate, was not broached as an issue for the rest of the group.

Despite this, the review process did spark some discussion about design. Although the proposal we had created saw little discussion, the process of collectively talking about design raised a number of ideas that MUCH members wanted to discuss. There were primarily framed in terms of viability, with individuals asking about the cost or planning implications of various design features.

“What about a roof garden? We had a friend who developed a garden on their roof, and it was just gorgeous.”

(F)

“Yes, but you have to think about it in terms of energy too. Would it impact our ability to have solar panels on the roof?”

(M)

“I’m sure we can have both, you don’t need the whole roof to be a garden. What are the rules about roof gardens?”

(F, March 2014)

By providing validation for the ideas raised by the group, all of which were feasible, my architectural knowledge was able to empower the group to expand their brief and highlight new ideas worthy of investigation. Whilst I had attempted to move away from an expert-novice relationship throughout the process, this was a situation where it proved to be mutually enabling.

### **Reapplication of architectural knowledge as a means of building confidence and mutual trust**

This workshop demonstrated the complexity involved in using spatial agency as a basis of architect-cohouser interactions. Whilst some elements of the design were derived from the mutual sharing of knowledge, other aspects of our collaboration fell short in this regard. In this workshop, my aim of building trust would result in my foregoing opportunities for us to act based on mutual knowledge. My reticence to intervene with the 8 House idea presents a situation where the cohousers were attempting to apply architectural knowledge to an architectural situation – an act that was initially empowering but which caused me to undermine my own knowledge as an architect.

An unexpected finding from this workshop was the influence of my own discursive inertia – the adoption of architectural norms in an unquestioning manner – and how this prevented the generation of mutual knowledge. The ‘crit’ format of our design review meeting was unsuccessful because I had not questioned whether it was appropriate, and my own confidence in the process prevented others from arguing for a different approach. The critique format was so ingrained into my conception of a design review, I did not stop to consider the difficulty I would pose to the rest of the group. Determining the blind spots within my discursive knowledge – aspects of my expertise that I am not disposed to question – would inform many of the future practice I developed with MUCH.

Despite this, the workshop also generated a number of successful outcomes. A key example of this was my decision to make a model, the rationale for which was informed by my role as an embedded practitioner within the group. Had I not been part of the group's meetings about non-design aspects of their community, I would not have understood the need for the group to build morale, confidence and legitimacy through this workshop, and thus might not have felt it necessary to produce a model or plans for the group. The result of this was a systemic trust in the processes of spatial agency, as the group understood that design could act as a medium for other aspects of the group's development.

Whilst the workshop itself provided limited means of exploring the cohousers various fields of expertise, it did succeed in developing trust and demonstrating that the architectural process could empower them to act. This trust in my own motives and the spatial agency approach enabled a deeper and more mutually affective collaboration in the later stages of the project. This workshop also enabled me to be more trusting of the MUCH members and my own role in our relationship. I was still nervous that the group would not see the value in our activities or would dismiss them as academic indulgences. Instead, the group embraced this workshop, which made me feel more confident developing further practices that they might initially consider unorthodox.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: Challenges to mutual knowledge**

This chapter highlights the challenges involved in developing non-hierarchical architect-cohouser relationships. The interactions through which a mutual knowledge base shared by both cohousers and architects rely on the subversion of power relationships, which cannot unilaterally be dismissed. It is not sufficient for the architect to decide that the cohousers knowledge is equal but different to their own. Instead, it is vital that the *cohouser* reaches this same conclusion. Whilst mutual knowledge is the aim, the realisation of this demands interactions that are grounded in the development of trust - an acceptance that the other agent values all knowledge equally.

My collaboration demonstrates that the critique of the architect set out in spatial agency is not unique to the profession, but shared by those outside the discourse. The challenge is that ‘other ways of doing architecture’ are imaginable to the architect, whereas these new roles cannot be conceived by those external to the discourse.

In order to create spatial agency in cohousing, the onus is on the architect to demonstrate an alternative vision of their profession. This can only be achieved by making others trust that they are different from their presumptions of the autonomous, commercially driven architect – a personal trust that the architect values their knowledge, and the systemic trust that the process will increase their agency. For the MUCH group, this enabled them to shift their perspective as to what relationship they wanted with an architect. Whilst initially they were focused on preventing the architect from having too much agency, the perspective shifted as our mutual trust increased. It was only through demonstrating that I valued their knowledge through practice that the MUCH group understood the potential for the architect to enable them to be creative. The collaboration that we developed provided the MUCH group not just an opportunity to participate in a co-design process, but the chance to direct the trajectory of this process as equal partners.

In most development contexts, the challenge for the spatial agent is the lack of opportunity to demonstrate that they are different from the autonomous architect. In cohousing, however, such an opportunity has emerged. The third wave of cohousing is predicated on the support of new partners such as charities, housing associations and local authorities. The resources these provide enable cohousing groups to subvert the traditional parameters of architectural engagement, and work with architects over a long period. This longer relationship between cohouser and architect provides a window in which the spatial agent is able to demonstrate the value of socially engaged architectural practice and to generate the necessary mutual trust to realise it. The key to this is for the spatial agent to reconsider their core aims when they start working with cohousers. Rather than seeking to make the cohousers design

as good as possible, the early focus of the spatial agent should be to find ways of supporting the cohousers to be fuller and more equal participants in co-production. Whilst in the short term this might undermine the architect's discursive knowledge, the resultant relationship enables both architect and cohouser to access knowledge that is otherwise unavailable to them, and use this to generate innovative and creative practices.



## 6 Negotiated Habitus

The previous chapter describes how MUCH and myself enabled the sharing of mutual knowledge through the generation of trust. The purpose of this was to allow the development of collaborative practices that valued architectural knowledge as more than building design expertise. Based on this broader understanding of architectural knowledge, this chapter explores the potential for the architect to act as a *spatial negotiator*.

Using Bourdieu's (1977) conception of habitus, the MUCH group can be understood as a series of individuals seeking to realise their own desires and dispositions in space. The role of the architect is to support the expression of their client's habitus, but this is complicated within cohousing because of presence of multiple people with often conflicting desires. As a result, any manifestation of the individual's desires and dispositions requires a form of negotiation to take place. The current response to this in cohousing is consensus decision-making (Renz 2006; UK Cohousing Network 2012), a verbal process of agreement grounded in an egalitarian ethos but which generates barriers when used as a basis for architectural design. The approach developed in this chapter seeks to offer an alternative to consensus, in which the medium of negotiation is shifted to design, and the act of negotiation opened to both the cohousers and the architect.

This chapter documents the critique of consensus decision-making and development of an alternative approach through four workshops: A consensus training session, a consensus-led design activity, a field trip to another community who used consensus, and a collaborative design charrette developed with students from Manchester School of Architecture.

## 6.1 The rationale and limits of consensus

### Defining consensus

In the early stages of their development, MUCH prioritised the development of operational processes to help them function as a collective entity. A key feature of this was the ability for the group to make decisions. The egalitarian membership model of cohousing demanded a non-hierarchical distribution of power within the group, and provided an opportunity for the group to embed their ethical position of equality within the structures of their organisation. Although much of the initial discussion about decision making focused on how the group would agree on policies at meetings, I reflected that the decision-making processes agreed by the group would have a significant effect on my interactions with the group, or any interaction the group would have with an architect.

Based on their initial research, the MUCH group initially followed the advice of the UK Cohousing Toolkit and adopted a ‘consensus decision-making’ approach (UK Cohousing Network 2012:8). Although two members of the group had some experience using consensus decision-making processes, the group agreed to source some external training to teach the group about consensus. Lancaster Cohousing practised consensus decision-making in their own cohousing development, and the group approached one of the Lancaster residents who is a consensus trainer to visit the group for an extensive workshop. I was invited to attend the training session in October 2013 alongside the MUCH members<sup>16</sup>.

At the training session, we discussed the principles of consensus and undertook some mock scenarios to test what we had learned. Much of this was dedicated to learning the language of consensus, and the various terminologies and hand gestures required to practice it. I had initially assumed that consensus was primarily a philosophical approach rather than a procedural method and

---

<sup>16</sup> An account of my subsequent field trip to Lancaster Cohousing, including a discussion about how consensus impacted the design of their community, can be found in section 6.3 (page 165)

reflected that any architect who was not experienced in the consensus approach would find interactions with the group confusing.

The approach we learned was based on a book developed by the skills development co-operative *Seeds for Change* (2013). This approach argues that consensus is not the attainment of unanimity, but instead finding solutions that “...everyone actively supports, or at least can live with” (Seeds for Change 2013:6). This is done through a cyclical process of discussion, proposal and counter-proposal until a mutually acceptable solution is found, avoiding situations where people are given stark, binary choices. Whilst each member of the group has a voice in this process, ideas are not voted on per se. Once a solution is suitably developed, individuals have the option to ‘stand aside’ (i.e. not agree with the decision but allow the group to continue) or to ‘block’ (i.e. veto) a proposal. It is up to each group to decide how to respond to stand asides, but a block requires a motion be discarded. This is seen as a last resort for when decisions go against an individual's core beliefs and must be taken bearing in mind that the block will result in the blocker “...stopping others going ahead with something they want to do” (Seeds for Change 2013:10)

### **Becoming a development ‘client’**

The MUCH group agreed to adopt consensus as a way of making decisions, using it as their standard process for the development of the community, with a view to adopting it as a way of eventually managing their community once they had moved in.

The implication of consensus on their relationship with other professionals was not discussed as a group. My own reflections on the consensus approach were that it primarily aimed to find agreement between the MUCH membership, rather than finding agreement between the MUCH members and any external agents (such as architects). I felt that this internalised decision making would be sufficient for the majority of decisions that MUCH would make but perhaps might limit the opportunities for the group to engage with myself as a spatial agent. My concern was that the group were adopting an approach that would

enable them to act as a single development client, limiting my ability to interact with the group as individuals. Consensus provided an internal power structure that would allow the MUCH group to operate as a single entity, as opposed to acting as multiple individuals. From the perspective of architectural development, this approach seems rational - it creates a single client with whom the architect engages in a dialogue, and provides simplicity and clarity to the process. From the perspective of a spatial agent, however, consensus seemed to provide limited opportunities for creativity. Consensus places the onus of negotiation on the cohousers alone and limits it to deliberation over a verbal proposal. I felt this under-represented the architect's ability to negotiate within the group, and to provide alternative resolutions that incorporate the differences within the group.

At this point, my relationship with the group was still forming, and I did not feel that I had developed the requisite trust with the rest of MUCH to share my critique of the consensus approach in relation to design. In January 2014, I was asked to develop a workshop with the group to explore different visions for their community. This would culminate in a set of design criteria, which would be agreed on by consensus. This highlighted a limit of the consensus approach in relation to design – the inability to negotiate the desires and dispositions (habitus) of the individuals in a way that accommodates the differences between individuals.

## **6.2 Accommodating difference**

### **Consensus in design**

In order to explore different visions for the community, I designed a narrative-based design workshop in which individuals imagined and shared stories about what they wanted life to be like in the MUCH community. The MUCH members were asked to describe an imagined day in their cohousing community, narrating the activities they engaged in, the interactions they had with others and the feelings they experienced. These stories were based on a series of scenarios that challenged the group to interrogate their own visions, and were

used to identify design features and the social expectations of the group. The workshop took place in two stages – the initial storytelling stage and the negotiation stage. This chapter examines the negotiation stage of the workshop, in which the group attempted to reach consensus regarding the ideas and concepts raised by individuals in the group<sup>17</sup>.

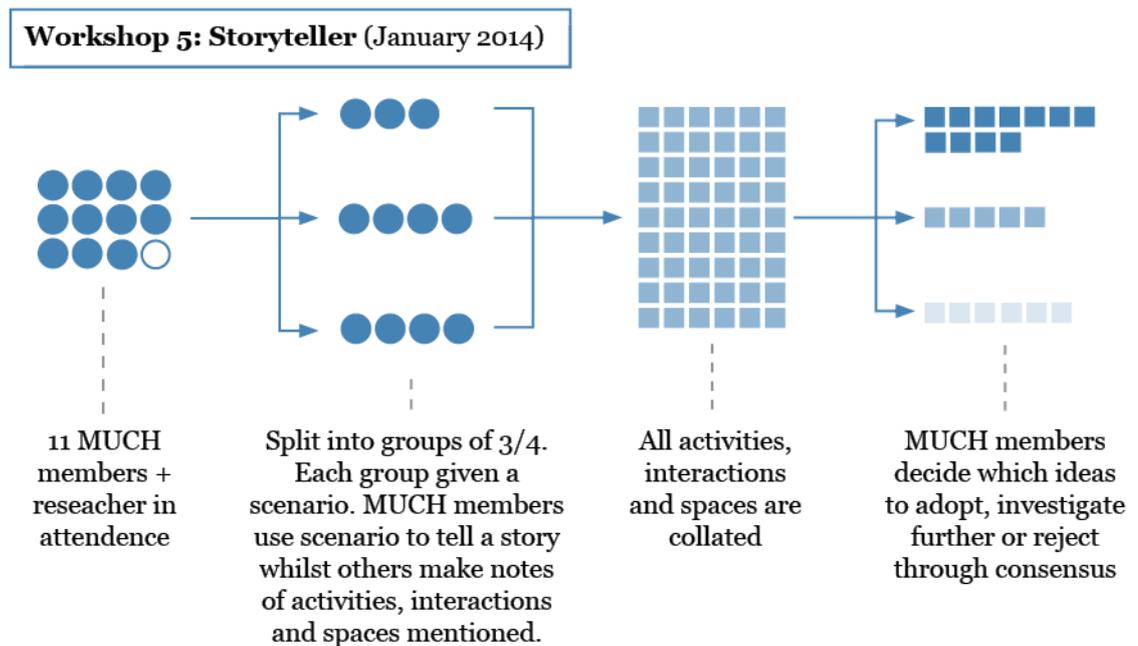


Figure 27: Diagram of Storyteller workshop (Author's own)

As a result of the storytelling activity, the group had created a series of Post-it notes for every space, activity and desired relationship mentioned within the narratives that were shared. I worked with one of the MUCH members to facilitate the second half of the workshop, where our aim was to identify proposals and ideas the group wanted to provisionally adopt, elements the group felt necessary to investigate further, and ideas that the group wished to oppose.

<sup>17</sup> The storytelling element of this workshop, which generated the ideas that were negotiated in this example, is discussed in section 7.2 (p. 196)

Placing all the Post-it notes on the wall into broad categories, we asked the group to place green, yellow and red stickers next to items that they personally agreed with, were unsure about or felt contradicted the collective 'vision and values' of the group, as defined in a previous workshop. The group then discussed all the items that did not obtain unanimous consent.

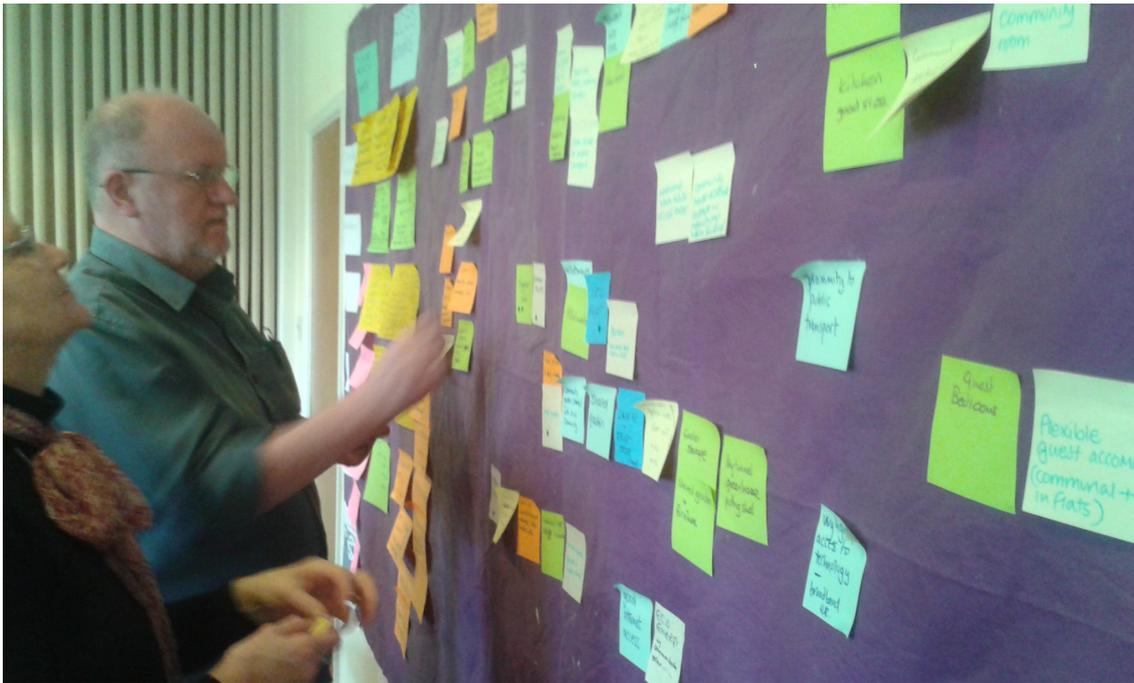


Figure 28: MUCH members participating in storyteller workshop (Author's own, January 2014)

The majority of yellow stickers were attributed to a lack of information, and most concerns were alleviated by the proposer explaining the details of their idea. One of the main concerns at this stage was regarding the potential cost of the ideas people had raised, but it was agreed that all items on the design criteria would be subject to further discussion and prioritisation once the group knew how large their budget was, the specific opportunities of their site, and the cost that the idea would entail. For items that were not unanimously approved via stickers, we used the consensus system to agree on them, and many were agreed once clarifications had been given.

Other concepts raised caused noticeable rifts between the group, and this highlighted some of the limitations of the consensus approach in design situations. One such schism related to driving, car ownership and parking. The proposal that households would have their own parking place received both green and red stickers, and those who placed red stickers were asked to share with the group why they found the idea objectionable.

In the subsequent discussion, two sides formed within the group. One set of MUCH members were against any parking being provided, arguing that this went against the collectively agreed vision to be as environmentally sustainable as possible. In response, the other group noted that it was also in the group's vision to promote active ageing, and argued that depriving them of access to their own car would undermine their ability to participate in society. The debate was relatively heated with both sides unable to accept compromises proposed by some of the more neutral participants, such as less parking, car sharing or providing households with a car sized plot of land that they could use as they pleased. Faced with two competing suggestions that would have resulted in each group blocking the proposals of the other, the discussion was deadlocked. It was decided that a sub-group would be charged with investigating the issue and reporting back to the group, but I sensed that a number of the group were bruised by this discussion, realising that their vision for the community was one fewer shared than they initially thought.

The use of consensus here was interesting because the group were not arguing over their individual desires, but a desired collective ethos. The compromise presented to the anti-car group for every individual to make their own choices about car ownership was not a sufficient because it would have meant that they weren't living in a *community* that embodied the qualities they desired it to.

Before the subgroup could report back on the parking issue, two people who adopted an anti-car position decided to leave the group. They cited time commitments and a desire to investigate other ways of creating a sustainable community as key determinants for deciding to leave, but it was hard to look

past the failed attempt to reach consensus as contributing to this decision to leave the group.

### **Conflict between the individual and the collective**

The consensus format of the narrative workshop limited my own contribution, and I felt disempowered to support the group during their discussion. There probably was a solution that could satisfy both parties, but a verbal discussion was not conducive to finding it. An oppositional perspective quickly formed, and rather than seeking consensus, both groups sought to dominate the other – attempting to provide a more robust argument whilst at the same time moving further apart. Consensus led the group to frame their interactions as a way of making a decision when a more suitable perspective would have been to use their interactions to find a creative resolution.

In terms of my aspirations as a spatial agent, the application of consensus in this workshop limited my role in contributing to the negotiation of the habitus held by the individual attendees. The issue was that I was not part of the negotiation, which instead was mediated by the group's process of proposal, discussion and agreement. In addition, the use of consensus seemed to promote the collective aims of the group over those of the individuals, making it more difficult to understand how each individual saw the proposals. Consensus provided a focus on generating a single solution to an issue, which the group passively understood as the same solution for everyone. The seemingly radical question is why the group would want to find a single solution, as opposed to accommodating the differences that were within the group. Rather than seeking to create something that was acceptable to everyone (and in this case failing to do so), I wondered what was stopping the group from developing 3 or 4 conflicting resolutions to a single issue. This would involve a different type of negotiation - an acceptance that other people have different habitus, and that things you object to might be equally important to others and should not be marginalised. Rather than using consensus to act as one, I considered how cohousing could provide a mass individual expression of agency.

The inability to disassociate the individual and the collective in the way decisions were made was the main barrier to this raised during the workshop. The habitus of the individuals motivated some of the group to want to live in a community that shared their values, thus imposing one individual's habitus on another. In the parking scenario, it was insufficient that the community could allow them to live without a car, as they desired to live in a community whose collective ethos mirrored and enriched their own. This shows that, as a spatial agent, it is insufficient to consider the MUCH group either as series of individuals or as a cohesive collective, but both simultaneously.

### **Negotiation as a discourse**

Based on the premise of cohousing, I had initially considered the role of the spatial agent to be one of negotiation. This workshop demonstrated the need for this negotiation to take place on both an individual and collective level. A cohousing community requires not just the negotiation of each member's personal desires, but also each member's vision for the community as a whole. Understanding this requires a different conception of the individual habitus and collective drivers of the community.

Whilst it would be tempting to conceptualise the MUCH group as an entity with a 'collective habitus', this is incompatible with Bourdieu's theories. The habitus is individually constructed, and key functions such as perception and experience can only be realised through individual experiences that "...simply cannot be extended to the collective level" (Atkinson 2011:337). To understand MUCH as a quasi-individual would act to hide the dissension and struggle that exists within the group, and thus provide limited means of negotiating the differences between members through creative practice.

An alternative conception of the MUCH group is to view the group as a discourse – an on-going, fluid field of debate between individuals. In this discourse, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' solutions, but instead a series of orthodox and heterodox points of view held by individuals within it, and with each individual seeking to promote their own positions as valid and useful

solutions. In the case of the parking dispute, both the pro- and anti-car groups were part of the discourse, with the debate being used in an attempt to make their position the collective orthodoxy.

Understanding the MUCH group as a discourse allows the contradictions in the group to be recognised, and presents an opportunity for me to intervene as a spatial agent. The group's focus on defining what is an acceptable and unacceptable response missed another of Bourdieu's concepts – 'doxa', the undiscussed elements within any discourse. The doxa represents the undisputed element within a field, as opposed to the orthodoxy and heterodoxy which are actively discussed and debated (see Figure 29).

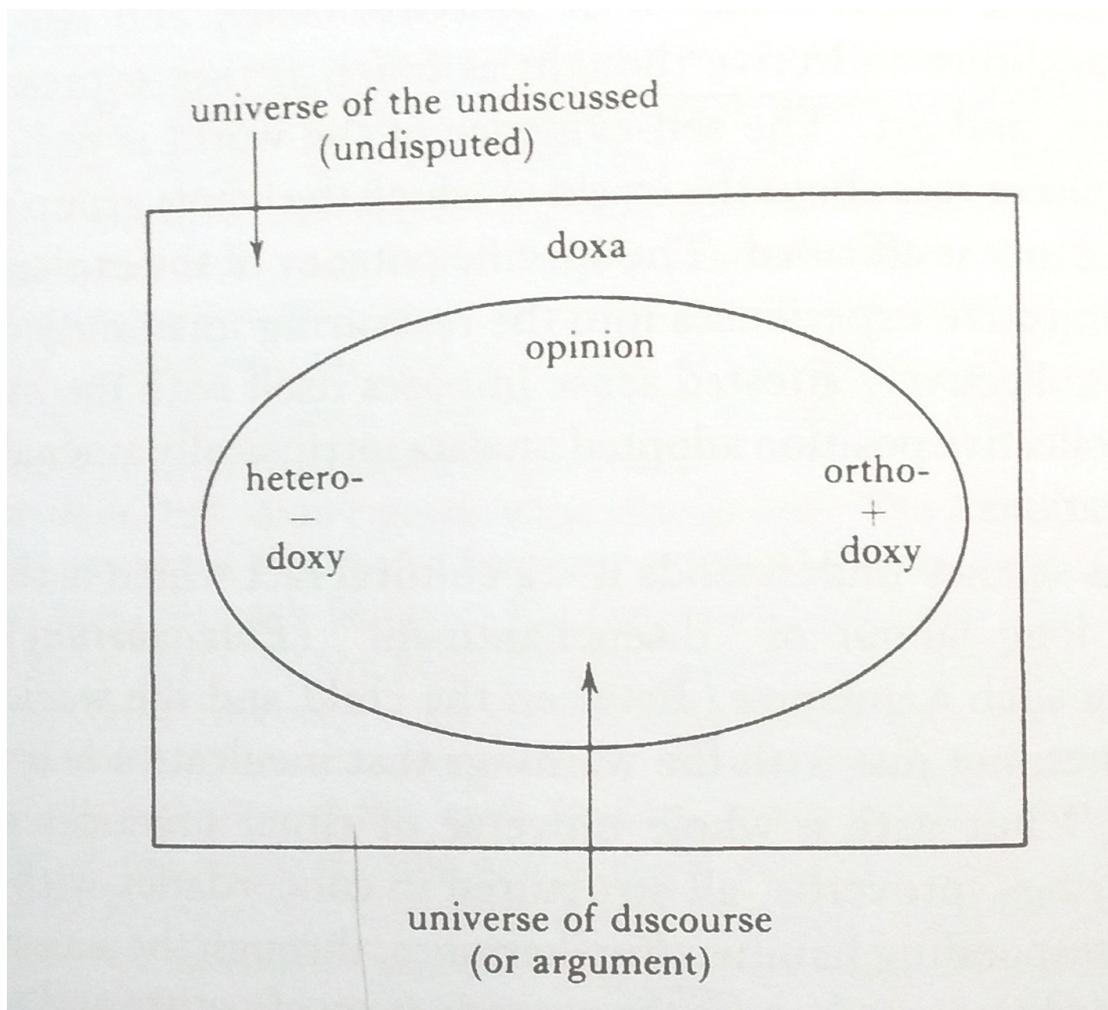


Figure 29: Bourdieu's concept of field - doxa and discourse (Bourdieu 1977:168)

Rather than choosing a side between different views, the understanding of doxa suggests that the architect should use their architectural and propositional skills to expand the discourse until either a different solution can be observed, or the rationale behind an existing solution becomes clearer. With regards to the parking scenario, the doxa of the situation was that the need for parking would be largely dependent on other factors. Had the group found a site close to public facilities and public transport, the demand for parking might be much less even from the members of the group who were adamant about their need for a car. Instead of trying to find consensus about how much parking should be included, an exploration of the doxa might have led the group to instead define the qualities of their desired site location as a means of finding a solution that both agreed to.

Despite these reservations, the fact that other cohousing groups had used consensus led me to question my assumptions. Perhaps the issue was that the group were inexperienced in using consensus, or the emerging social links between the group were not yet strong enough to enable consensus to occur. The opportunity to explore this arose when two of the MUCH group organised a visit Lancaster Cohousing, a community who had adopted consensus as part of their development processes. I took this as a chance to examine how others had adopted consensus, and to explore if the issues raised in relation to our narrative workshop would also be manifest in a group who were more experienced in the consensus approach.

### **6.3 Challenging the primacy of the imagined collective**

#### **Appropriation at Lancaster Cohousing**

Lancaster Cohousing is located on the banks of the River Lune in the village of Halton, approximately 3 miles from the centre of Lancaster in Lancashire, UK. In April 2014, myself and two MUCH members were invited to visit by two Lancaster residents, with whom the MUCH members were acquaintances. Prior to our visit, the MUCH group helped us to developed a list of questions or topics

the group desired information about, including the influence of consensus on the group's development.

Lancaster Cohousing consists of 41 dwellings, the majority of which were two storey terrace properties with three bedrooms, split between four small blocks across the site. Through consensus, the group opted to create standardised house plans and specifications. Lancaster is a large community where most of the group's design decisions were delegated to various sub-committees. They, in turn, made proposals to the wider community, which were decided through consensus at larger meetings.



Figure 30: Photo of Lancaster Cohousing  
(Image: Author's own, April 2014)

The two residents who showed us around noted that they felt they had little input into the design, with one suggesting that she wasn't particularly interested in the physical community, as it was the social concepts that drew her to join the group. Despite this suggested lack of interest, both had responded to the design of their homes by making a number of alterations to the standard properties

they purchased. The first of our hosts lived in an ‘inverted’ two-storey property, with a large vaulted ceiling in the upper floor living space. She had suggested that she wants to install a deck level in the vaulted ceiling to create more space and to install roof lights but was not sure whether she will be allowed to do so by the rest of the community. She has also installed timber decking to the standard metal balcony and had covered the standard, locally sourced timber floors with a level of plywood and engineered oak flooring. Our other host also planned to replace some of her flooring, because she felt that wood floors in the kitchen had too many gaps between the boards. She had also expressed a desire to install some hanging baskets on the outside of her house, but again professed to being unsure as to whether this would be allowed by the community, as it might affect the air tightness of her building.



Figure 31: Timber decking installed over original steel balcony at Lancaster Cohousing  
(Image: Author's own, April 2014)

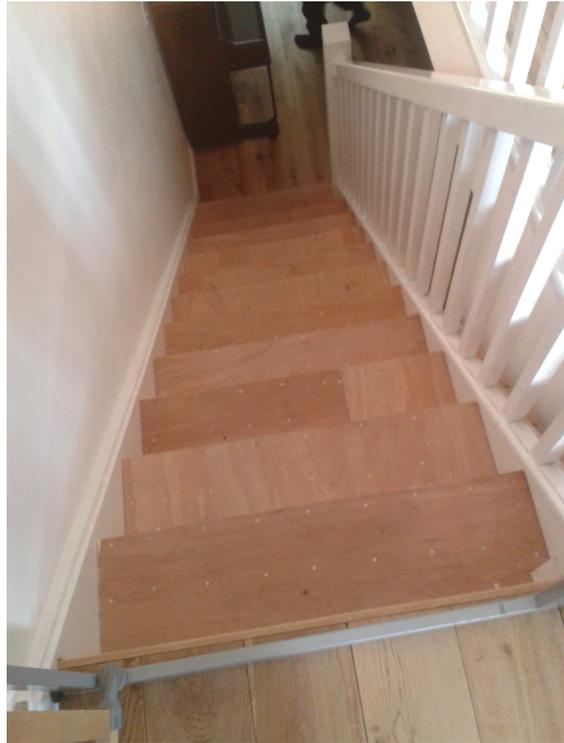


Figure 32: Example of physical adaptations at Lancaster Cohousing  
(Image: Author's own, April 2014)

To understand why these appropriations and adaptations were necessary, we must consider how Lancaster was developed. Lancaster used consensus as a means of acting as a single client, which enabled them to approach their development in the same way as any commercial client. As a result, the group adopted traditional development norms by promoting standardisation, both for simplicity and financial efficiency. Standardisation led the group to be defined by the collective ethos of the group, rather than the individual's desires. For Lancaster, the key collective ethos was that the community "...will encourage social interaction and will be built on ecological values." (Lancaster Cohousing 2015).

With regard to their environmental aims, the cohousers at Lancaster were undoubtedly successful – the dwellings meet passivhaus standard<sup>18</sup>, are served by a district heating system and the group have gone to great efforts to source

---

<sup>18</sup> Passivhaus is an energy performance standard based on achieving high levels of thermal insulation and air tightness to reduce the heating demands of a building

materials from local and sustainable sources. The residents we spoke to were very happy with the sustainability of their homes and how small their utility bills were, but these alterations suggest that the desires of the residents cannot be understood through the guise of sustainability alone, as some compromised these aims in favour of other factors such as comfort or aesthetic tastes. Despite having only been open for 2 years prior to our visit, the appropriation and adaptations demonstrated the limits of their collective, consensus driven approach. Our visit showed that when the individual has agency over their surroundings they will choose to deploy it, even when this contradicts the collective ethos of the group. This is demonstrated clearly in the example of the resident replacing timber floors with low embodied energy with engineered oak laminate flooring. Whilst the individual was committed to environmentalism, in this case their individual habitus prioritised aesthetics or easier maintenance.

In addition to the adaptations and appropriation to the standardised properties, our hosts also suggested that the consensus system did not give them a chance to dissent in the design phase. They noted that a number of people were having problems with the low flow toilets and low water baths, but that in the design phase there was no real opportunity to object to these proposals. The collective vision of the community called for sustainability, and thus a low water bath was the only rational collective response. An individual contesting this concept based on their preference (i.e. "I like to have deep baths") was not seen as a suitable objection in consensus because it conflicts with the group's central aim. Dissent was therefore internalised by the individual during the design process, preventing residents from being able to test whether their own worries against those of others. Our hosts argued that they knew a few people had replaced their baths and toilets with standard fittings, suggesting that had the internalised concerns of individuals been shared, the group might have taken a different approach.

### **The generation of 'grouphink' through consensus**

My key reflection from Lancaster was that the collective focus of consensus decision-making had led the group not only to subordinate their individual

desires to the community ethos, but to generate an abstract collective ethos that many in the group disagreed with and were unable to challenge.

In limiting the debate around heterodoxies within the group, such as deviations from the aim of sustainability in favour of individual's desire, the process reinforced a feeling that everyone agreed with these proposals, further internalising any dissent an individual might feel. This perpetuated the false consensus of the imagined cohouser, a collective abstraction of themselves that few could universally agree with. The Lancaster group had created a collective abstraction of themselves based on a perceived embodiment of the group's ideals, but this abstraction was based on what the residents *thought* others wanted rather than what they themselves desired. This can be seen as an example of 'groupthink', or a situation where "...group members are reluctant to publicly express private concerns about collective problems if they believe that other members are likely to disagree with them." (Packer 2009:546).

Groupthink should not be considered a symptom of a collective delusion, but rather a mechanism of group cohesion. Within consensus, value is placed on harmony and maintaining working relationships, even if it limits the opportunity for critical assessment (Schweiger, Sandberg, and Rechner 1989), thus groupthink is a permitted consequence. By adopting the perceived group ideals, cohousers are complying with the consensus position that any proposal which the individual doesn't entirely agree with is not 'worse' than the solution desired by the individual, but 'better' than not being able to agree on a proposal at all. By avoiding conflict, and even the adherence to 'groupthink', the cohousers are facilitating the on-going application of consensus and thus the process of the project as a whole.

Whilst Lancaster Cohousing can attest to many successes, my reflection of our visit was that consensus had limited them creatively. It confirmed many of my concerns about consensus, as the process neither enabled individuals to express themselves individually nor set out a collective vision that negotiated the diversity of views within the community. From my perspective, the most notable

part of the community design was the appropriation and ownership that individuals had taken over their environment, a rejection of a consensus that was not suiting their needs.

I explained my thoughts to the other MUCH members as we returned to Manchester, who shared my reflections. Despite this, they questioned what alternatives were available to them. An opportunity to test a different approach to negotiation arose in October 2014, as part of an international seminar that MUCH and myself were to organise for the SATCHEL (Seniors Accessing Technologies for Co-Housing with E-Learning) research network.

#### **6.4 Design as a medium of negotiation**

The limits of consensus identified in these previous engagements had demonstrated the incompatibility of this approach and spatial agency. The consensus process limited the possibility of the architect, who is external to the act of consensus, from being able to use their propositional and creative knowledge to support the group in defining their vision. This perpetuates the traditional model of architecture that spatial agency seeks to subvert, preventing the architect from being able to contribute to the group's development as a social agent in their own right.

The narrative workshop and Lancaster field trip both demonstrated how the conflict between the individual and the collective creates a challenging environment for the architect. As a spatial agent, it was necessary to develop and demonstrate an alternative method of negotiation that embraces this conflict. By critiquing these workshops, a number of key characteristics of this new form of negotiation had emerged. First, the architect must understand the individual habitus of those they are interacting with – what drives them as individuals, and what social vision do they want cohousing to enable them to achieve. Second, the architect must be able to give this habitus a form of spatial expression (be that built or un-built). Third, the architect must recognise that the habitus is unique to an individual, and in cohousing seek to negotiate different habitus into a complementary and mutually enabling proposal. Fourth,

this negotiation must expand the collective discourse of the group – giving expression to a shared ethos that the group could not previously conceive.

An opportunity to explore this emerged as a result of a research network that myself and MUCH were participating in. SATCHEL (Seniors Accessing Technologies for Co-Housing with E-Learning) is a pan-European knowledge exchange network of older people exploring their role as innovators in the home, city and online. The participants in the network are the members of Loppukiri cohousing<sup>19</sup> in Helsinki (supported by Laurea University), the SeniorLab digital innovation group in Barcelona, Manchester Metropolitan University, Age-Friendly Manchester (Manchester City Council) and MUCH. Around half of this delegation either lived in cohousing or were trying to develop a cohousing community, whilst the other half had little knowledge of the model prior to the network forming in 2013. The network hosted a three day series of activities in Manchester in October 2014 with 24 delegates in attendance, for which I offered to design a full day workshop exploring the design of cohousing.

### **The architect as negotiator**

The workshop I produced questioned the traditional cohousing model in which a community had a single architect. Instead, the workshop explored a scenario in which every cohouser had their own architect who would negotiate on behalf with other architects to define a collective response. On a conceptual level, this would fulfil the aims of the architect as a spatial negotiator - an individual architect to understand the habitus of the individual, give it spatial expression, negotiate it propositionally with others to propose ideas that expanded the discourse of what cohousing could achieve. Although there would be practical limits to this approach in a real setting, during a short workshop I felt it would provide a suitable means of examining an alternative mode of negotiation to the current consensus model.

---

<sup>19</sup> Loppukiri Cohousing and their relationship with architect Kirsti Sivén is discussed in section 2.4 (p. 54-57). The development of this case study was largely informed by a previous SATCHEL network meeting in May 2014, which included a visit to Loppukiri.

To undertake this workshop, I would need to recruit a number of architects to partner with the SATCHEL delegates. For this, I approached Helen Aston and Dr Stefan White, who were tutors of MSAp, a Master level atelier in Manchester School of Architecture. The atelier has a focus on creating links between architecture and society, and as a former student in this atelier I was confident that the students would not be daunted by the nature of the workshop. Aston and White agreed to allow 10 fifth year students take part in the workshop as a one-off workshop, with 2 sixth year students also volunteering to participate based on their own interest in cohousing. The inclusion of students in my plan was well received by the MUCH members, who were excited at the opportunity to engage with future professionals and generate wider impacts from their work.

Prior to the workshop, I had only given minimal information to the students about the SATCHEL members and cohousing, although some students were aware of the concept through their own independent research. This was purposeful, the hope being that the students would not be constrained by any preconceived notion of what cohousing should be and hopefully challenge them to interpret their understanding of the cohousers in novel and innovative ways. The only preparation I asked the students to undertake was to develop a set of questions to ask the SATCHEL delegate, and a strategy for recording their conversations visually and spatially.

**Workshop 10: SACHEL Design Charrette (October 2014)**

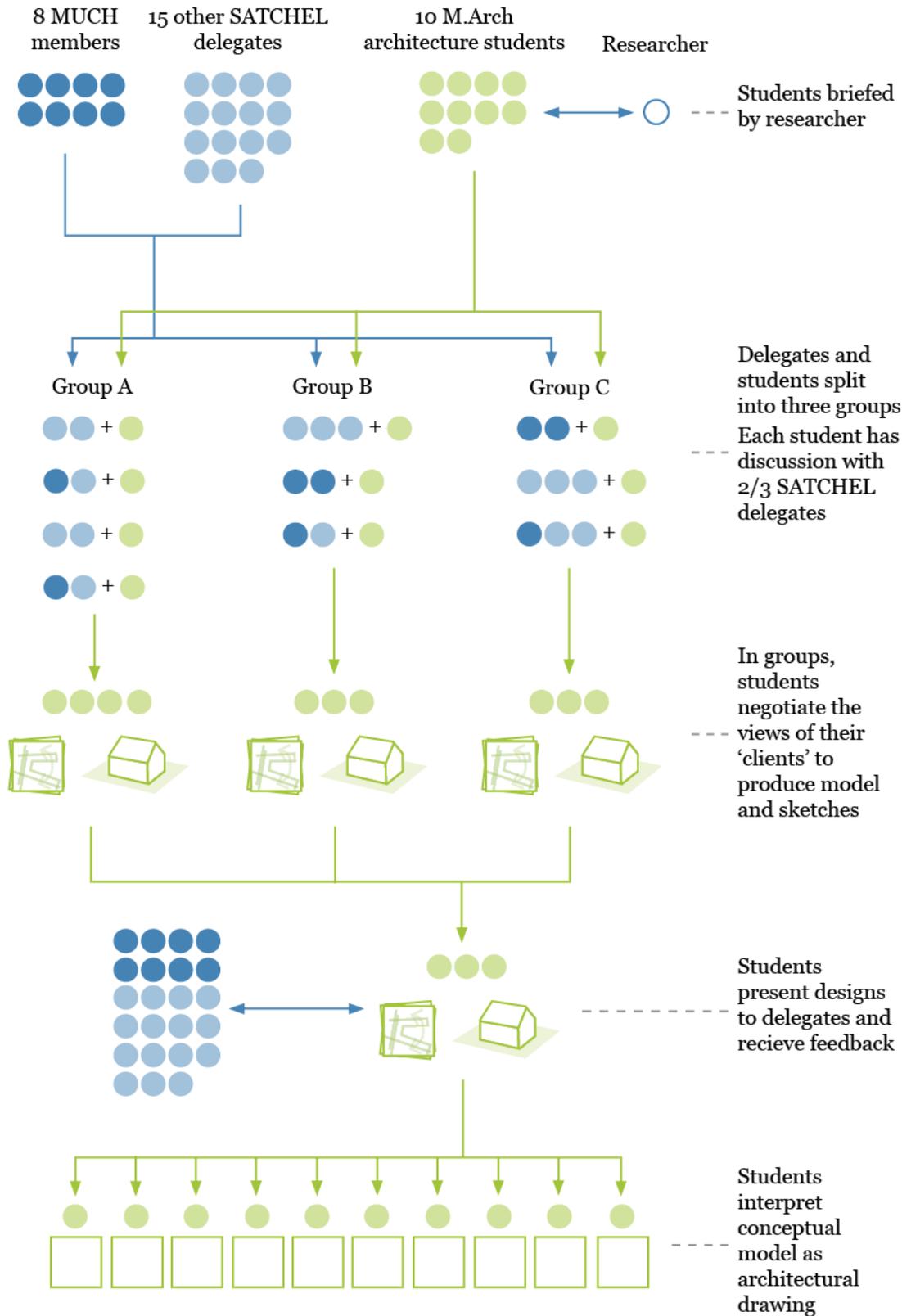


Figure 33: Diagram of SACHEL design charrette (Author's own)

The aim of the workshop was to use spatial negotiation to design a cohousing community in just 4 hours. The students were split into 3 groups, each tasked with creating their own design. This was to simplify the process in response to the limited time available for the workshop. Each student was paired with 1,2 or 3 delegates each, with the number determined by the limited English skills of some delegates and the requirement for translation. I selected a site that the three groups used for their designs and presented it to both the students and delegates at the beginning of the workshop. I chose a brownfield site on Ducie Street in Manchester City Centre. This decision was taken because it offered the students some interesting design constraints (such as the adjacent canal and nearby railway line), but would also challenge the MUCH members to explore the opportunities and limitations that would come with a higher density cohousing community.

The workshop was broken up into four phases – engagement, negotiation, reflection and communication.

- 1. Engagement: The delegates and students had in-depth conversations, enabling the student to later advocate for them in the design phase.
  2. Negotiation: In groups, the students would share who their delegate was and develop a negotiated, conceptual model that reflects the delegate's individual and collective desires.
  3. Reflection: The students reported back to the delegates and received feedback on their ideas.
  4. Communication: Each student interpreted their conceptual model and sketches into a single architectural drawing.

## Engagement – exploration of habitus



Figure 34: MSA students and SATCHEL delegates in conversation  
(Image: Author's own, October 2014)

In the first phase of the workshop, the students discussed the interests and dispositions of the SATCHEL members, forming some ideas of how these could be manifest in a cohousing community. Each of the groups devised different approaches to these engagements. All 3 sets of student produced a list of topics they felt necessary to cover, but the approaches used differed from group to group. One set of students developed a card game as an engagement technique in order to 'break the ice' and put the participants at ease, thus allowing them to engage in deeper discussions within the short timeframe they had available to them. Others created a series of sketches of their conversations that were shared with the participants in real time, allowing reflexive feedback about the spatial interpretations made by the designer.



Figure 35: MSA student documenting conversation through diagrams and sketches  
(Image: Author's own, October 2014)

Through these conversations, the students were able to diagram not just their interpretation of the individual, but of the individual's conception of what could be achieved together. For example, one student noted that two of her delegates had recently written a children's book of which they were very proud. The student asked if storytelling was something that they wished to share with other people, leading to a long conversation where the group imagined how they could create connections with schools, and have a performance space, or a specific writing room where they could work together. From the tone of the conversation, it was clear that this was not something the delegates had considered possible, but when raised as a possibility sparked a flurry of creativity. Other issues that students explored included supporting older people to remain in employment, concerns about dementia through design and examining the potential for nature to be incorporated into an urban plot.

Had the workshop jumped straight to a collective design perspective, it is unlikely that this conversation would have taken place and thus been explored. The advantage of the 1-on-1 engagement was that it allowed the architect and cohousers to transcend worries about groupthink or what was universally acceptable, and thus allows creative ideas which challenge the standardised conventions seen in most cohousing communities.

### **Negotiation – creating a collective discourse**



Figure 36: MSA students creating a conceptual model based on their negotiated design  
(Image: Author's own, October 2014)

After these conversations, three hours were set aside for the students to share what they had learned about their cohousers, and negotiate this together into a single proposition that responded both collectively and individually to the conversations they had. The delegates were not present during this phase, as they were attending a separate lecture.

The communication phase took the form of short 5-minute summaries for each participant who the group would be designing for. This shared discussion allowed each member of the group to identify ideas, opportunities and paradoxes which arose in relation to their own conversations. Following the student's presentations, the group began negotiating their designs, first through sketches and diagrams, and later through a conceptual model.



Figure 37: Example of conceptual model made by MSA students  
(Image: Author's own, October 2014)

Whilst many groups discovered that multiple people shared a similar vision, much of this exercise was dedicated to negotiating the individual desires into shared or multi-purpose spaces. One of the groups devised a master plan based on a central performance commons and ateliers for creative labour, bringing together the diversity of activities generated through their discussion (choir singing, storytelling, radical oratory) and conceptual ideas about how the delegates saw their role in the city (intergenerational co-learning asset, focal point for community, not a gated community). The students suggested ways in which the space could adapt to different activities, audiences and practices to

produce a dynamic space that responded to different events. Unlike consensus, the master plan made no attempt to create something that everyone would enjoy all the time. It instead embraced the overlapping territories of individuals and the public to propose a space which is produced by communality, but not unanimity.

### **Reflection and communication – discourse as a creative medium**

Once the cohousers had returned, the groups were asked to present their designs to the group, and with each student explaining to the cohousers how the engagement activities had influenced the collective design.



Figure 38: MSA students presenting their designs back to the SACHEL delegates  
(Images: Author's own, October 2014)

Learning from my experiences using a ‘crit’ format in a previous design charrette<sup>20</sup>, we decided to undertake a slightly different approach in this workshop. Rather than seeking to expose the weaknesses of the designs to enable the students to improve, the discussions instead focused on extrapolating the creativity that the students had already developed. The students identified the links between conversation and design in order to demonstrate to the group how they had influenced the design that was developed, which empowered the delegates to propose more ideas and expand upon those already proposed. Whilst there were some issues regarding the clarity of the designs as a result of the short time the group had to create drawings and models, this format of reflection felt much more productive than the previous crit method we had used.

This was resolved through the student’s final task which took place the day after the workshop, in which they individually interpreted their abstract group models through a single architectural drawing. These represented an aesthetic, a technical feature or inhabitation through section, perspective or axonometric. These were shared with the SATCHEL group digitally, and later at an exhibition in a library close to the Loppukiri cohousing community. Although the delegates did not provide direct feedback on these aesthetics, many noted that they had a better understanding of the nature of the practice, as they had previously considered the abstract models as form of final ‘output’, rather than the documentation of the negotiative processes the students had developed.

---

<sup>20</sup> The previous workshop in which a design crit format was employed with mixed results is discussed in section 5.3 (p.138-150)



Figure 39: Examples of MSA student works  
(Images: Daniel Kelso (top), Luke Carver (middle) and Vilde  
Kulikauskaite (bottom))

Feedback from this workshop was largely positive, with a Loppukiri resident noting that she wished they had taken a step back to consider broader ideas when they were developing. An unexpected finding was that this workshop empowered the MUCH group to value their own expertise more. Although the MUCH group informally said that they had enjoyed the workshop, some of the group noted with surprise that the students were not particularly knowledgeable about some of the issues that the cohousers were motivated by. One of the group shared her experience during a later discussion;

“We got onto dementia, and the way we were talking it was clear that they [the student] didn’t really know much about it. I was a bit surprised really, I would have thought that was something that architects would know more about.”

(F, November 2014)

### **Reflections on spatial negotiation**

I felt that this workshop was successful in demonstrating the potential of the architect’s role as a spatial negotiator. The key innovation that enabled this to occur was, paradoxically, that the focus of interactions with the students was not on what should be designed, but who they were as people and what they wanted to achieve. The focus on the habitus allowed a much more open basis for negotiation, as the students were less concerned as to how two different building might fit onto a site, and more focused on how two different visions might be promoted through design.

In addition, ideas such as the proposed creative commons design helped to develop a collective discourse that married together seemingly conflicting desires of residents in a way that opened up more opportunities. Because this proposal successfully unified these different ideas into a single concept, the delegates were able to understand the benefits of bringing together different ideas, rather than focusing on the elements or activities that individuals personally disliked.

On reflection, the relative naivety of the students proved to be of significant benefit to the workshop. The students were given little notice of the workshop and most had a limited knowledge of cohousing, which combined with the lack of constraints placed upon them allowed the group to present radically different vision of cohousing, unencumbered by the orthodoxies that myself and the MUCH group had adopted after lengthy engagement in the field. Delegates were excited by the diversity of designs, particularly some of the broader conceptual ideas that were raised. The workshop showed that, as opposed to the mutual acceptance model in consensus, the cohousers were empowered by the exploration of conflict and territory in which difference was embraced as a positive means of generating new ideas.

The SATCHEL workshop attempted, in a very literal way, to demonstrate how a personal architect-client relationship could be used to define communities as both individual and collective at once. Although it is unlikely that a cohousing group would employ 12 architects to develop individual architect-client relationship with, the workshop demonstrated how a single architect could engage with individual cohousers and negotiate solutions that promoted difference and conflict in a mutually agreeable way. The innovation in this approach in comparison to consensus decision-making is that the point of negotiation is shifted from being internally realised within the collective client, to being open to the external knowledge of the spatial agent. This enables both parties to formulate creative solutions that accept the inevitable conflict within the collective development process, rather than seeking to remove or subdue it.

## **6.5 Conclusion: Negotiation as a means of creativity**

Much of the existing discourse and guidance available to cohousing groups promotes a position that cohousers must act more like a traditional client in order to be efficient and align with the predominant systems in which any architectural project is produced. The compromise to this is that the group can act like a better type of developer – one in which all agents have an equal ability to determine the goals of the development and how it is realised. Consensus

provides a suitable means of acting as a single client, but in doing so leads to the primacy of the collective identity of the group, and perpetuates a situation in which the individual is subservient to the collective, rather than the collective subservient to the desires of individuals. Giddens argues that there is a moral basis that underpins the interactions between agents, which he refers to as 'norms', in which acceptable behaviour is constructed collectively (Giddens 1976:122–23). Consensus decision-making imposes a moral norm regarding the primacy of the collective, which is manifest through the conceptualisation of the block or veto. The blocker is presented as someone who is preventing others from doing as they please, and thus the individual should feel guilt for opposing ideas they find objectionable. For individuals to increase their agency – the underlying rationale for cohousing – the imposition of guilt for expressing heterodox beliefs marginalises the radical potential offered by cohousing.

Spatial agency provides an alternative conception of negotiation, allowing the individual and collective realisation of the community to be developed mutually. The SATCHEL workshop demonstrates the possibility of using architectural knowledge to enable cohousers to find ways of accommodating the differences within the group, not just the commonalities. This is achieved by shifting the purpose of negotiation away from finding agreement, and towards generating new creative solutions.

My collaboration with MUCH identified the challenges of undertaking this role as a spatial negotiator. First, the conflict between the negotiation as something internal to the group, or undertaken with external agents. The notion that cohousing groups should act more like traditional clients was appealing to the cohousers, particularly in the early stages where the group wanted to feel they were making progress and becoming legitimate. Through our collaboration, the MUCH group shifted their thinking towards how negotiation could contribute to investigating new ideas, but it is easy to see how cohousing groups fall back onto the adoption of cohousing orthodoxies because alternative means of negotiation are not promoted as viable.

Another barrier was the way that individual cohousers had created a collective vision alongside their own personal motivations for cohousing. This complicates the act of negotiation, and any mutually agreed shared vision would have to be suitably vague in order to find agreement, but that manifestations of this shared vision are very real. The example of Lancaster Cohousing demonstrates this, as individuals said they wanted sustainability, but when it was manifest in reality that didn't mean that they wanted this over a deep bath and an oak floor.

The key finding of this practice was that the process of negotiation is not to simply transition from the individual's spatial demands to a single architectural vision, as this demands a reductive approach in which nobody gets what they actually desired. By being embedded in the process of negotiation, spatial agency can instead focus on what individuals are trying to achieve, using this to develop a discourse that the group are able to shape and define their own individual experiences within. This approach embraces the differences between people and negotiates them spatially in a way that expands the understanding of what cohousing is able to achieve.

The notion of spatial agency as a form of negotiation provides a vital platform in enabling the fundamental reason for the architect-cohouser relationship – the emergence of creativity. Chapter 7 explores how architect and cohouser, as knowledgeable agents within their own shared discourse, can interact in a way that enables both to be creative.

## 7 Shared Creativity

Spatial agency challenges the understanding of the architect as the sole creative agent within architectural practices. Cohousing provides an opportunity to explore different relationships between architect and citizen and raises the prospect that creativity can be a shared endeavour. This shared creativity is based on the premise that creativity cannot emerge without the stimulus or exposure to ideas outside of one's self. In cohousing, there is an opportunity for both architect and cohouser to share the different expertise, dispositions and ideas that others hold and augment them with their own, thus producing innovative actions and proposals that they would be unable to generate in isolation. My collaboration with MUCH described thus far can be understood as creating the conditions for creativity to emerge. By building trust between us, we became open to sharing our knowledge with each other, and by understanding each other as simultaneously driven by individual and collective desires we learned about what the group were trying to achieve through cohousing.

This chapter examines four workshops that demonstrate how our interactions both enabled us to be creative, but also identifies situations in which this shared creativity was limited. This focuses on the 'sense of limits' – a term Bourdieu uses to describe how individuals are dependent on their past experiences to create their actions (Bourdieu 1977:164). This chapter explores how a sense of limits reduces the potential for creativity that falls outside of an individual's past experiences. Whilst Bourdieu uses the concept of a 'sense of limits' to explain why society fundamentally doesn't change, this chapter demonstrates how being conscious of the sense of limits we experience can enable creativity by expanding the boundaries of what we deem possible. This chapter explores this through the analysis of four workshops; a design game, storyteller workshop, case study review, and design charrette.

## 7.1 Identifying a sense of limits

### Assessing the group's creativity through design games

At my initial meeting with MUCH, I agreed to contribute to a series of recruitment events the group were planning in March and April 2013. I met with two of the group some weeks prior to these workshops to discuss the activity I was planning to run. The recruitment events would last three hours, and the group had already developed a series of presentations and activities where they would present what cohousing was and what MUCH were trying to achieve. I was tasked with developing a 90-minute activity for the final event, for which the group were expecting around 25 attendees. The group identified three aims of the activity – to be enjoyable, to enable people to get to know each other better and to provide an opportunity for the attendees to ‘be creative’. In response to this, I proposed the idea of a design game, in which small groups had to design a cohousing community based on constraints that they would randomly receive throughout the workshop.

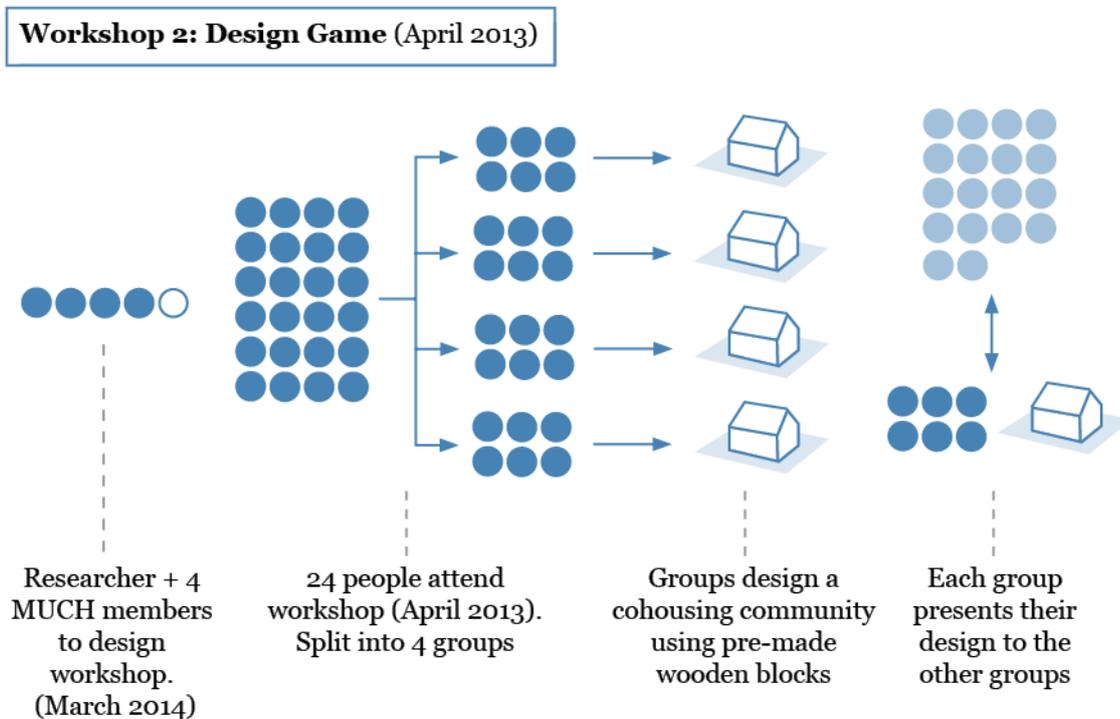


Figure 40: Diagram of design game workshop (Author's own)

I planned to split the group into four groups of around six attendees. Each group would be given a different site plan and asked to work together to design a 'cohousing community', a concept that was introduced to attendees during two introductory workshops organised by MUCH in the preceding two weeks. At various points in the workshop, each group would be given new constraints or situation to respond to. These scenarios were both internal issues (such as an increase in demand for properties in the community) and external (such as the closure of a local library). Participants could choose what response if any, they wanted to make to these challenges. At the end of the session, a member of each team would present their design to the rest of the groups.

We agreed that drawing was quite an intimidating tool for design due to the permanence of every line, and thus we agreed that model making would be a more appropriate medium for the attendees to design with. I offered to make a series of wooden blocks and shapes for the groups to use, as well as a cheat sheet that showed the size of a few common items that people might want to place on the site, such as sheds, parking spaces and picnic tables.

Due to the large number of attendees, my role on the day would have to be limited to offering light support and clarifications, as I would have to circulate around all four groups. As a result, this workshop would demonstrate the creativity of the cohousers without the external support of an architect. Recognising this, a secondary aim of the workshop emerged – understanding the limitations to the creativity of the cohousers.

### **Outline of Design Game**

The design game workshop was attended by 22 people - 7 of the original MUCH members, and 15 newcomers, all of whom had attended the previous two recruitment events. The attendees were split into 4 groups, making sure there was a mixture of both those who were new and more experienced about cohousing. Each group were given a 1:200 scale satellite map of their site, which I had selected based on well known brownfield sites in Levenshulme, the

neighbourhood where most of the participants had come from. I presented the rules of the 'game' – namely that they would have to design a cohousing community on their site, and that I would provide them with a 'chance' card every 15 minutes that added a new constraint to which they had to respond. The 'chance' cards were prompts to help the groups think about different things cohousing could respond to. Examples included constraints such as 'The local pub closes down, and the nearest one is now 2 miles away' and 'Five households suddenly decide they each want to own a dog'.

The four groups began the workshop, and I circulated around the tables to offer support where needed. Three of the groups made quick progress, but one of the groups needed more support. This fourth group seemed reticent to actually place any blocks on their site, instead wanting to completely resolve their design before they made their model. Recognising the difficulties they were having, I spent some time talking to the group about where their discussion had gone, and myself arranging the blocks based on their discussion. This seemed to work well, as the group then started moving and changing the model by themselves, and soon the design bore no similarity to the arrangement I had made.

At the end of the workshop, the attendees circulated around the tables as one member of each group presented their design and how they had responded to the chance cards they had posed. These presentations, as well as my conversations as the workshop progressed, highlighted the knowledge and creativity expressed by the participants, but also demonstrated the barriers to further creativity.



Figure 41: MUCH members taking part in Design Game workshop  
(Images: Author's own, April 2013)

### **Examples of creativity and the emergence of a sense of limits**

One of the aspects of this workshop was that the designs produced by the four groups demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of certain design skills. One group, in particular, demonstrated this by integrating both experiential desires and sustainable ideas into their design.

“It was hard, but we wanted everyone to get a balcony or a terrace which faces south. This [pointing] is the common house, which is orientated west and south, so it's good for getting the evening sun for parties... There's an orchard, BBQ, swimming pond...it's self-cleaning, we would have to install a specific reed bed that filters the water. We could even do a reed bed here to filter all our sewage.”

(F, April 2013)

Another group suggested that each of the floors of their apartment block would be a different colour as a way of making their design dementia friendly. None of the group worked specifically in dementia or design fields, and when I asked how they knew about the use of colour and dementia, one of the group simply suggested that they had read about it 'somewhere'. Both of these examples highlighted the breadth of knowledge held by the group, not by virtue of their professions, but because they were well read and travelled, and thus had the ability to access past experiences when proposing new ideas. This also carried over into discussions of aesthetics and materiality that one of the groups had. One of the groups entered into a discussion about how they could maintain their property, which led to one of the group to propose a novel solution.

"We had some different views. We had the view that it should be Stalinist concrete or the view that it should be decorated with ceramic tiles. There's a guy in Vienna who does ceramics on the outsides of buildings. We thought that it would be sustainable and easy to clean.”

(M, April 2013)

I later deduced that the 'guy in Vienna' was Otto Wagner, who used ceramics on the façade of his art nouveau apartments (see Figure 42). One member of the group had seen these whilst on holiday, which obviously made a lasting positive impression.



Figure 42: Otto Wagner's tiled 'Majolikahaus' building in Vienna, Austria  
(Image: Newman 2008)

The use of past experiences to propose new ideas - be that reading (dementia), holidays (ceramics) or simply using space (evening sun) – demonstrated how the habitus provides a basis for creativity. Bourdieu argues that habitus is always grounded in the past experiences of individuals, surmising that “...it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result” (Bourdieu 1977:79). The example of Wagner’s ceramics shows how experience enabled one of the participants to develop an aesthetic disposition, but also that the agent was able to transpose this into a new context – a response to how they could easily maintain their building.

Whilst ‘yesterday's man' provided the impetus of creativity, in this case, there were others whereby the opposite was true. Bourdieu suggests that the habitus has a filtering effect on human practice that generates a “...sense of limits”, in which all actions reproduce the “established order” rather than genuinely innovative ideas (Bourdieu 1977:164). He proposes that individuals place a self-imposed demand for realism in their actions, which cause past experiences to be

reproduced and perpetuating certain ideas as being “sensible” and “reasonable” (Bourdieu 1977:79). Examples of the sense of limits that the four cohousing groups placed on themselves highlighted the limits of the cohousers creativity, and suggest the opportunities for a future relationship between myself and the cohousers based on shared creativity.

### **Determinants of a sense of limits**

The ‘sense of limits’ that I observed within the workshops were derived from two interrelated constraints. First, there were examples in which groups regulated their actions in order to make ‘sensible’ propositions. Second, there were a number of situations in which the participants had ideas and desires that they were unable to propose in spatial forms.

The self-regulating tendencies of the groups were evident in the way that they adopted standard elements of the cohousing model without questioning what they were, or whether they were really necessary. All of the groups included a ‘common house’ as part of their design, but nobody had really elaborated on what this would entail other than the orthodox dining room and kitchen.

During the workshop I heard a number of people identify more unusual ideas, including a brewery and a cinema type-space, only to have these ideas dismissed as unrealistic by others. The designation of these ideas as unreasonable was because they have never seen a housing community with a brewery attached to it, but I reflected that this in itself shouldn’t have made the idea unreasonable. The space a small brewery would take up would be no more than an art room or craft workshop – ideas that can be seen in various existing cohousing communities. The participant had seen examples of cohousing communities with a common dining room, thus understanding the form it could take and that it would be financially feasible to do. The barrier to creativity in this situation was that the participants couldn’t imagine a cohousing community with a brewery, what spatial form it would take or whether it would be affordable.

Another theme was that the group raised conceptual ideas that they were unable to propose because they couldn't conceive the forms they would take. One group had considered the issue of laundry facilities in relation to their wider goal of making their design energy efficient. They first highlighted the possibility for a shared laundry facility as a means of sharing resources, but then reflected this did not go far enough.

"We are a bit worried about where you would dry clothes. We don't know if there would be enough [natural] drying area or if we would need dryers in the utility room. Would we just use mains, or could we use our own solar panels?"

(F, April 2013)

The group recognised that natural drying was preferable, and wanted the building to enable them to do this in some way, but could not conceive how this would work. The group raised vague ideas about airflow and some type of 'dry greenhouse', but they were unable to progress with the idea.

"Maybe if the bottom layer [of the apartment block] was perforated we could get airflow or something. I really don't know... That's what you need architects for!"

(F, April 2013)

Another group shared this perspective of the architect's ability to help imagine how abstract desires could be realised spatially.

"We wanted the architect to sort out something which we couldn't quite articulate, some sort of atrium conservatory thing which means we could have a light space in winter but still open it up in summer."

(F, April 2013)

These quotes highlighted the crux of the sense of limits – the potential for the architect to enable the cohousers to be more creative. The group were already proposing exciting ideas but were unable to evaluate the realism of their ideas or realise the more conceptual proposals they were generating.

This workshop highlighted one of the key roles for the spatial agent – supporting cohousers to overcome their sense of limits by sharing in mutually creative practices. As an architect, I recognised that I held skills that could give form to the desires expressed but not spatialised in this workshop, helping to challenge what was ‘sensible’ and expanding their conception of what was possible. Equally, this would be reliant on the cohousers sharing their own knowledge and ideas. A traditional, autonomous architect would be unlikely to have considered a naturally ventilated laundry room, nor explored a tiled façade as a means of reducing cleaning costs. Both the cohouser and spatial agent enable each other to increase their agency through sharing their creativity, thus enabling both to achieve more than they could alone.

One of the challenges of this workshop was that I was asking the participants to act as architects. Whilst this did demonstrate the wide range of capabilities within the group, it also placed the onus on them to propose the spatial manifestation of their desires, something that paradoxically acted as a barrier to creativity. I reflected that it would be interesting to explore other mediums of creativity that allowed the group to be propositional without forcing them to express their ideas architecturally. The opportunity for this arose some months later when the group had set aside a workshop to create the first draft of their design brief. I offered to develop an activity in response to this, using storytelling as a way of exploring spatial desires without the need to conform to traditional architectural methodologies.

## **7.2 Narrative as a means of overcoming self-imposed limits**

### **Developing the storyteller workshop**

Soon after the recruitment events, we identified a need to start thinking about what the community would actually entail. Up until this point, the MUCH group had been using a design brief that was developed long before my collaboration began and the recruitment phase had been undertaken. This mostly consisted of

a generic room specification derived from cohousing guides, and the cohousers themselves were quick to point out that this was a placeholder when discussing it with others. Although having a final brief would be something they recognised would develop later, it was decided at a general meeting that the group should start developing it as soon as possible. This, they argued, would enable them both to start having conversations with developers, help them to start with their site search, and give the ideas time to grow and be tested as the group progressed.

I offered to develop a workshop to help develop the group's brief. Recognising that 'sense of limits' which impacted the previous workshop, I wanted to move away from simply asking the group 'what spaces do you want your community to have', as this would inevitably limit the responses to 'what ideas do you think are realistic?' and 'what have you seen elsewhere?'. I saw the workshop as an opportunity to help the cohousers interrogate their sense of limits by providing a medium for the group to share and discuss their ideas separately from the architectural forms these ideas might take. As a result of discussions with the cohousers about how they would feel comfortable discussing their ideas, I designed a short narrative-based workshop in which the MUCH members would use storytelling as a means of expressing their desired experiences and feelings. I felt that storytelling would overcome the need for the participants to talk specifically about spaces and forms, and in doing so create distance between the expectations of what cohousing should include and their own desired experiences in cohousing. This is not to say these narratives would not be spatially propositional, as they would inevitably discuss the environment the stories took place in, but rather that the space would be derived from the discussion of experience, rather than the other way around.

I ran the storyteller workshop as part of the January 2014 monthly general meeting. In groups of 3 or 4, I asked each MUCH member to tell a story describing a single day in their new cohousing community. Participants were asked to suggest what they would do and who else would be there, either inside their home, the cohousing community or outside the community. To help the

group develop these stories, I gave each group a constraint within which to frame their narratives. The scenarios chosen were; a Sunday in summer, a cold and rainy Tuesday, and Christmas Eve. As the stories were being told, another member of each group would make notes of all the activities being proposed and any details related to these. After everyone had told a story, they were asked to report back some of the key elements of the discussion to the rest of the group. Following this, the whole workshop was repeated with a single change – the cohousers were asked to tell a story based on the same scenario, but 20 years in the future.

### **Critiques of cohousing through narrative**

Much like the previous design game workshop, this exercise both enabled creative ideas to emerge and highlighted the limits of the group's creative potential. It quickly became clear that, rather than proposing a radical vision of cohousing, the participants used the workshop to test and elaborate on the existing cohousing orthodoxy. The workshop showed how a sense of limits was perpetuating the inclusion of cohousing norms in their narrative, but equally generated opportunities for the cohousers to interrogate the impact of these norms within specific situations

A good example of this emerged in the group who were tasked with describing the experiences of Christmas Eve in their imagined cohousing community. One of the group described how her children would come over to stay with her over Christmas, as they currently did in her present home. Interestingly, this participant generated an additional constraint; she imagined that the cohousing community would have a guest room (which is very much part of the cohousing orthodoxy), but in her story this room was overbooked. Her story proposed that her family had to stay at a hotel nearby, which she argued was not ideal but that she could not imagine another way of doing it. In this story, the MUCH member had effectively critiqued a 'sensible' element of the cohousing orthodoxy as insufficient but also identified her own inability to propose an alternative proposition. In a short discussion that followed the story, another cohouser said that they go away at Christmas so the narrator's children they could stay in her

flat instead of a hotel. It would have been easy for the participants to simply suggest that the community would need more guest rooms, but in talking about their desired experiences a creative, social alternative of room sharing emerged.

Other stories developed by the MUCH members expanded upon some of the elements of the cohousing orthodoxy, imagining different uses and relationship within spaces that that would be 'realistic' for a cohousing community to contain. For example, one of the stories focused around holding a Christmas meal for socially isolated older people in the community. This meal was to take place in a large communal dining room, a space that is ubiquitous in the cohousing orthodoxy. This shows that whilst the individual still retained a sense of limits by proposing a standard cohousing element, they also acted creatively by reinterpreting its use to match their own habitus – a social desire to provide support for people in their local neighbourhood. On one level, this story might affect how the dining space could be designed, taking into account a different use of the space. Equally, the story identified a social desire that could be explored in a multitude of different ways. Whilst the story applied a desire to the expected form a cohousing community might take, the insight it provided can be used to generate new spaces and ideas that fall outside of the norms of cohousing, but which achieve the desired goal identified by the storyteller.

When the workshop transitioned into telling a story that imagined the community in 20 years time, it became evident that the group were having a more difficult time imagining what their community would be like. Many of the stories seemed to suggest that the community would start to look inwards and that individuals might not have such strong relationships with the wider community. Some suggested that communal spaces might be used less as people became less active, whilst others proposed that they would be used more because people were less able to attend other events in the community. It was noticeable that the stories at this stage had much less clarity, and posed fewer definitive uses and interactions than the previous sets of stories. This highlighted the challenge facing the group - the need to imagine possible futures that are contingent on their future unknown desires and capabilities.

The outcome of this workshop was the identification of activities, relationships, experiences that members of the group desired. By taking the focus away from proposing the spaces through which these could be realised, the cohousers were enabled to have a critical perspective on their preconceived spatial understanding of cohousing. These ideas provided a rich resource for future creativity, as our interactions could be grounded in realising these desires in new spatial and programmatic ways. This could not have been identified in a workshop that focused primarily on what rooms and spaces the group wanted to include in their community.

One of the issues with the workshop was that all of the stories retained the 'sensible' cohousing orthodoxy. Despite this, each of the stories also seemed to be critical of different design elements of cohousing. It occurred to me at this point that this was one of the first occasions that these criticisms had been raised. In previous discussions and field trips, the focus had primarily been on what the group liked about cohousing, rather than their doubts. I was equally guilty of this, having not shared my own critique of the cohousing model with the group for fear of lambasting a model that the group were committed to. By seeing that the group also held doubts about the cohousing orthodoxy, I felt empowered to act upon this. The group agreed to my request to run a workshop at a future general meeting, in which we critically discuss our experiences of visiting different cohousing communities.

### **7.3 Exploring sense of limits through shared critique**

#### **The collective reflection of cohousing experiences**

The previous workshops demonstrated how the existing field of cohousing had, in part, generated the sense of limits that was curtailing the potential for creativity. One of the ways that the existing field of cohousing influenced us was through the visits we had made to cohousing communities. Whilst the purpose of these visits was to learn from the experiences of those who had developed cohousing, these visits were not treated in a particularly critical way. The

reflections we had made were mostly informal, and not widely discussed as a group. When we had visited a cohousing community, we were shown around by a resident who was able to answer our questions. Whilst this was an excellent source of information and insight, it also generated only positive discussion, so not to offend our hosts.

As part of the on-going programme of activities seeking to understand what kind of community the MUCH group wanted to create, I offered to organise a workshop that reflected on the visits that the group had already undertaken. This took place during the June 2014 monthly general meeting. Members of the group had visited three cohousing communities in recent months that would become the basis of our discussion; Lancaster Cohousing (UK), LILAC (Leeds, UK) and Loppukiri (Helsinki, Finland). Initially, I felt it would be positive to allow each attendee at the meeting to write down their thoughts about their experiences, and then use these to have a discussion about the specific case studies and cohousing in general. For each of the three case studies, I provided a large blank sheet of paper with images to refresh the cohousers memories and invited the group to write positive and negative perceptions they had in their visits and conversations, and what they would have changed about each community. The group broke off to write on these sheets and discuss what their reflections between themselves.

As people wrote their comments next to each case study, I noticed that the group had focused on providing a spatial critique of the communities they had visited. Comments included the limited size of certain spaces, the lack of storage, or the aesthetic of the buildings. Within these observations, however, a broader critique of cohousing was able to emerge.

An example of this was the discourse that emerged surrounding communal space. In previous activities, such as the recruitment workshop, the group had based their ideas around a single 'common house', even though the group had never examined this proposition in detail. During our discussion about LILAC cohousing, the group offered some criticisms of the single common house

approach. LILAC featured a single, multi-story house in which the ground floor had been converted into a dining room and kitchen. The group noticed that this space seemed to offer little potential for activities other than eating. This was juxtaposed against the comments made about the outdoor space at LILAC. There was near unanimous agreement that the external spaces at LILAC, particularly the central pond, were of a very high quality and gave the community a strong character and sense of connection. When asked to elaborate on what specifically they liked about it, the group suggested that the design of the garden created interesting social spaces which they could imagine using. A key element of this was the diversity of these spaces in terms of size, privacy and shelter, with the group suggesting how they could all be used differently.

The group built upon this critique of the single common house when discussing the Loppukiri case study. One of the key features of Loppukiri was the different social spaces that were spread across the building, rather than in a single cluster. Although the community did have a large dining room and kitchen on the ground floor, it also featured a mixed use communal room, a library, a roof terrace, and a snug on the top floor next to the two saunas. One of the group identified a quality of the Loppukiri design that I had not previously considered – the lack of determination of these spaces. The example given was the top floor snug (see Figure 43), which was used to host a singing group. Although the snug was not designed for this purpose, and in fact was designed before the Loppukiri residents knew they would have a singing group, it proves to be a perfect spot for the group. Some members of the singing group had reported during our visit that they liked using the space because of the ambience created by the fireplace and views over the lake it offered, it was away from the apartments so not to disturb anyone, and was a good size for their group.



Figure 43: Rooftop communal space and terrace at Loppukiri Cohousing  
(Image: Author's own)

So far, the MUCH group had been focused on proposing spaces that were determined by the programme of activities and relationships that they wanted to occur. The discussion that this example raised was that there were activities that the group could not know in advance, and thus their response must also enable different forms of habitation to emerge. The Loppukiri example also introduced a means of doing this that appealed to the group, as the spaces were different and characterful rather than being a generic blank canvas. This insight could also be read as a response to the previous storytelling workshop, in which the group struggled to propose a vision for their future that was contingent on a myriad of other factors.

At this stage, one of the MUCH members questioned how having lots of common spaces could be affordable. In response, I recalled a conversation she had with a Loppukiri resident. I had noticed that the apartments were quite

small, and during our visit, I asked a resident whether this was OK. They agreed that the properties were smaller than most in Finland, but the diversity of social spaces and regularity of social activities made this manageable. Recognising a balance between individual homes and shared facilities, the innovation Loppukiri had developed was to place just a small amount more emphasis on the communal. In response to this, the MUCH group agreed to investigate this balance in future design activities.

In sharing our observations with each other we were able to identify the elements of the cohousing orthodoxy that we had previously adopted passively and turn this into an opportunity to support each other to be creative. The ideas that were generated in this meeting were reliant not just on sharing the different experiences during our various visits, but also the ways that we as individuals reflected and made sense of what we saw. Although 6 of the group had visited Loppukiri, only one of the group had identified the lack of spatial determination, and only I had thought to ask a resident about the trade-off between the individual and communal. Sharing these reflections – experiences imbued by the expertise we all held as individuals - enabled the group to collectively reshape the discourse that underpinned all the actions they would take.

### **The emergence of a creative discourse**

By reflecting on our experiences of visiting cohousing communities, the MUCH cohousers were able to expose a key element of the cohousing doxa – that cohousing can have negative aspects. This seems obvious, much of the current discourse within the field takes a positive, activist position on cohousing (Tummers 2016:2027–28). Any discussion of the negatives is projected externally, usually by identifying the difficulty finding land or gaining finances as a constraint to the cohousing approach. This positivity had been useful for the MUCH group initially, as it enthused the group and made cohousing exciting. At this stage, however, the lack of critical perspective was starting to limit their opportunity to be creative. By generating a shared critique of cohousing, the MUCH group were empowered to shift the discourse that was

governing their actions, identifying new areas of investigation in which novel proposals might emerge.

At this stage, the group had decided that they wanted to undertake a new design charrette to explore this new discourse, linking both the group's desire to explore their new discourse, undertake a feasibility study on a site that had become available, and produce a document to share with potential recruits and development partners.

#### **7.4 Building design as a means of expanding creative discourse**

The autumn of 2014 saw the group reach a number of crossroads. After the initial recruitment drive, the group had since seen a number of members leave. The group had also reached a point where they felt ready to start collaborating with an external partner and particularly wanted to form a relationship with a housing association. Finally, the group wished to start their search for a site in earnest, recognising that this would be a significant challenge. The group suggested that each of these aims were linked by a need to be propositional. The group wanted to offer a vision for their community as a means of attracting new members, show their competence in order to gain trust with housing associations, and wanted to assess potential sites by testing what could be done with them. This led us to agree to undertake another design charrette on a site that had been identified by three members of the group – an abandoned factory on Elbow Street.

### Workshop 9: Elbow Street Design Charrette (June-July 2014)

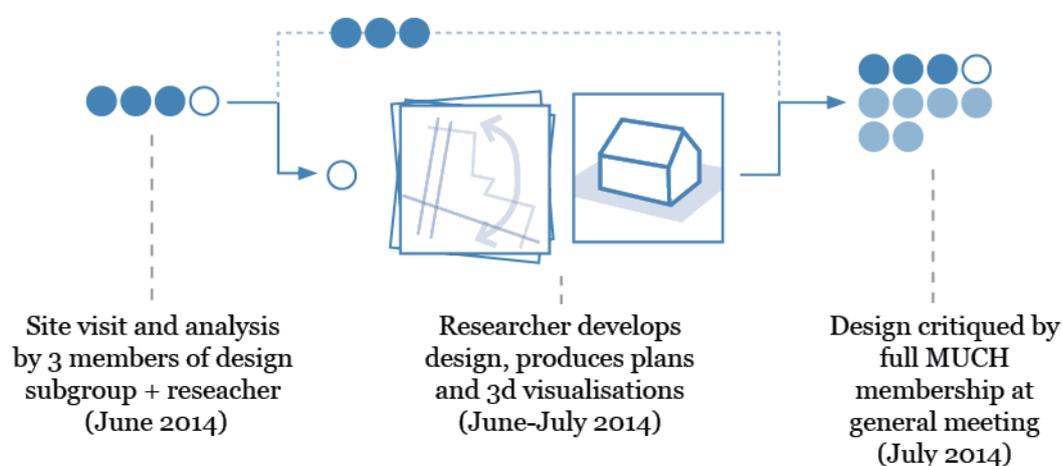


Figure 44: Diagram of Elbow Street Design Charrette (Author's own)

Unlike the previous design charrette, I would develop the majority of the design work autonomously for this workshop. I was confident at this stage that I would be able to incorporate the needs and desires of the group into the design – I had spent the last two years learning about the group and my own understanding of cohousing were developed from within these interactions. Equally, I felt the group trusted me, and trusted that the approach that we had undertaken together would not undermine their vision and future ability to influence the further development of our shared discourse. I saw the design charrette as an opportunity to interpret the shared discourse we had generated in novel ways without fear of undermining their creativity, something that had affected our previous design charrette based on Albany Road<sup>21</sup>.

#### Initial discussion and site analysis

Building the MUCH group's capability to evaluate potential sites was identified as a priority for the group, so whilst I was to undertake the design work myself, we collaborated in undertaking a site visit. I had produced a guide for the MUCH members, including both on-site and off-site analysis of the site. This guide contained a checklist of aspects to consider when visiting a site, and a

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 5

guide to web-based investigations the group might undertake such as calculating the area of the site or finding details about the owner through the Land Registry. We agreed to test this guide on the Elbow Street site, and three MUCH members joined me to undertake the site visit and have a brief discussion about the potential of the site.

The Elbow Street site was a brownfield industrial plot, bounded by roads on three sides and a church on the southern boundary. The east end of the plot consists of the derelict shell of the Atlas Engineering Work, with other small industrial units of varying levels of decay across the rest of the site.



Figure 45: MUCH members outside the Atlas Engineering Works  
(Image: Author's own, June 2014)

We observed that the street facing external wall of the Atlas factory were in a good state of repair, but that the roof and other external walls had fallen in. As we talked around the perimeter of the site, the MUCH members expressed their admiration for the Atlas building. Although in disrepair and suffering from a series of unsightly alterations over the course of its industrial life, the building was an aesthetically pleasing example of a Victorian factory – well proportioned,

with interesting brick detailing and large windows (albeit many having been bricked up). The MUCH group asked what the potential was for retaining the existing structure, but I was unsure. The building lacked a roof, and much of the factory aside from the façade looked in a bad state of repair. I offered to investigate the potential of retaining parts of the building in my design.

### **Generating design from the collective discourse**

Although much this charrette would build on the discourse developed within the MUCH group, I was also given some more concrete requirements to help develop my design. In order to develop a budget in a previous workshop, the group had decided that their community would need 5 one bedroom, 10 two bedroom, 5 three bedroom dwellings, numbers that broadly extrapolated the desired property sizes of the current MUCH membership.

I started my design by exploring the suggested retention of the Atlas building currently on the site. As an industrial building, the massing of the building was not particularly suited to a residential development, as the deep plan that would limit natural light. The existing factory was 9m tall, therefore it would be feasible to fit a 3 storey residential programme within it, but this would be difficult because the existing windows were designed for a single, tall factory space.

I decided that much of the factory could not be retained in a way that would meet the needs of the community, but resolved to keep the two external walls that the group had admired. To make this work, I would have to create a separation between the wall and any new residential structure. I initially set aside this space to as circulation between the floors of the apartments. Once I mocked this up it was clear that this space would be far too dramatic to remain as just circulation, and instead offered potential as an intriguing shared space. The discourse of the group had identified the potential of creating a diversity of spaces with different characters, which would allow them to appropriate in ways they could not yet conceive. This factory space seemed to fulfil this aim, providing a dramatic, multi-height space running parallel to both their

apartments and the street pavement, a space with potentially public and private use that was open to the wider community.



Figure 46: Diagrammatic plan of Elbow Street design  
(Author's own, July 2014)



Figure 47: Perspective overview of Elbow Street proposal  
(Author's own, July 2014)



Figure 48: Perspective of communal space within the shell of the  
Atlas Engineering Works  
(Author's own, July 2014)

The desire for communal cooking and eating were an element of the cohousing orthodoxy which had been embraced by the group. Eating outside had been something that had emerged in many of the stories that were shared during the narrative workshop we had previously held, which informed the location of these facilities.

My next design feature combined two elements of the discourse that had not previously been linked. The limitations of dining spaces were noted in our previous case study review workshop. Some had suggested that dining spaces were either too large to be comfortable if you just want a cup of tea, leading us to discuss the potential for a smaller informal common space. In considering this smaller common space, I also took into account a wider part of the communities discourse - the group's desire to be an asset to their local community. Thus far, our discussions had focused on the access to the spaces, imagining that the common house could be made available for local activities or group. My design proposed linking the small social space with the creation of a community asset, by creating a café-library that opened out to the main street frontage. This, I felt, would give the group a space designed to be shared with the wider community, maintaining a distinction between the public and the private spaces in the community, and providing a space that had the flexibility to be used as anything from a lounge to a public resource.

The individual apartments were something that had received little discussion. This is understandable, as the cohousing model is based on the position that it is architecturally just like 'normal' housing. Other cohousing examples we had seen had relatively generic floor plans, muted material palettes and standardised fixtures - a comfortable, blank canvas for the individual to make their home in. Based on my experiences attending meetings at the MUCH member's houses, I was aware that the group had different aesthetic tastes. I opted to introduce the idea of 'self-finish' construction into the design, in which individuals undertake the final fit-out themselves based on their own material and fitting choices. I felt this was a natural extension of the generic aesthetic that most other cohousing schemes had adopted, and mitigates against the

wasteful alterations to new properties that we experienced on some of our field trips.

For the dwellings, I chose to make the one and two bedroom properties single storey apartments, and the three bedroom dwellings into either terraces or duplex. I noticed an overlap between those who wished to own a larger property and those who wanted the community to offer social, rather than physical support for ageing. Dating back to the early recruitment workshops, some of the group had been adamant that they wanted a house, which I had interpreted as a part of the continuity necessary for them to feel comfortable moving into cohousing. On the contrary, many of those who desired a smaller property expressed concerns about their mobility and a perceived future decline in their capabilities – a conscious recognition that living in their current homes would not be a sustainable long-term option. Whilst it seemed counter intuitive to be designing an older people's cohousing community with staircases, in doing so the design fulfilled the desires of some of the group.

Based on these ideas, I developed a series of plans, perspectives and a short sun path animation in order to communicate my design back to the MUCH group. Recognising the difficulties in undertaking a design 'crit', for this workshop I tried to frame our review more as an informal discussion. Despite this, many of the questions related to the clarity of my communication ("Where are the lifts?", "What is the roof made of?") rather than comments about how I had interpreted their vision or the ideas that I presented. The group were pleased with what I presented but I felt unsure whether this was a genuine affinity of my proposals, or just that they had a visual and formal expression of the group for the first time. I felt it necessary to step away from the design for a few weeks and undertake my own critique of the design, which I would then discuss with the group.

### **Self-reflection of design response**

On reflection, I was disappointed that the design I created was not more challenging to the cohousing orthodoxy. I had naively interpreted my role as

helping the cohousers to develop a discourse that could be manifest in space, but in doing this I was not cognisant of the tacit, unspoken role I had within our collaboration - supporting MUCH to reach a point where they can build and live in a cohousing community. This second role had not played a conscious part in how I developed this workshop and created this design, and thus I was blind to the ways that my own 'sense of limits' might influence my ability to be creative.

My sense of limits could be summarised as the creation of a link between my own agency and the viability of my proposals. This undermined my goal of practising as a spatial agent, which is grounded in the understanding that architectural knowledge should not be limited to built form. My design under-represented the creativity and ideas raised by the group in favour of negotiating them in the form of a building that was realistic and viable, if unchallenging. Although seeking viability was not a conscious decision, the rationale for this became apparent in retrospect. My relationship with the group had changed in recent months, moving both towards a more experimental understanding of cohousing but also one in which I was providing them more support than previously. In producing a design grounded in viability, my practices were a response to my own insecurities about my role as an academic practitioner – a untested assumption that the experimental elements of my practice were not of interest to the MUCH members, and that the pragmatic support I could give them would be of more value to them.

There were a number examples of this sense of limits. First, my design had a particularly unchallenging form and aesthetic. This was an area of the MUCH discourse that was underdeveloped and thus could benefit from my ideas, but instead, my design could be seen as inoffensive but equally unchallenging. Similarly, the designs of the apartments offered little to either give form to ideas they had raised nor support the group to explore new ideas. Whilst I felt that I had some success in spatialising elements of the group's discourse and giving formal expression to ideas or dispositions which were previously abstract to the MUCH group, I felt that the design was less successful in overcoming areas where there were disagreements. For example, the group had been engaged in

an on-going discussion regarding the level of parking they would need. This was an area of the discourse that was difficult to resolve, and thus one where I could have introduced new ideas through my design. Instead, I opted to include 15 parking spaces, which was the midpoint between the two opposing camps. This would not support the group to find a solution to their problem, and thus I reflected was a cowardly response on my part.

My sense of limits could be seen as the professional inertia that spatial agency attempts to critique, but in cohousing it was also a product of my role as a spatial agent. A large part of our collaboration was enabling the MUCH group to transition from a 'client' perspective to a 'users' or 'citizens' role. This transition was central to our interactions, allowing the group to be more creative and experimental in their understanding of cohousing and what they wanted to achieve. Without someone in a client role, our collaboration was at risk of becoming a theoretical exploration rather than one that might enable the MUCH group to progress. This workshop showed how I took on some of the qualities of a client, generating constraints in order to demonstrate the realism and viability of our proposals, even though this undermined the ability for both myself and the MUCH group to be creative. Some time after this workshop, I held a focus group with some of the MUCH members to discuss my reflections of this design, and our collaboration in general.

### **Collective reflection with MUCH**

At my discussion with the MUCH group, I noted my dissatisfaction with my design, which I felt did not do enough to express or support the creativity of the group. The MUCH group were initially in disagreement with my assessment, arguing that the ability to give form to our discussions was something they didn't imagine possible without our collaboration.

“...personally I was a bit surprised. I don't think you have done us any disservice. When you turned our thinking into a design on a laptop... I was blown away.”

(F, November 2014)

Whilst I appreciated this, I outlined my concerns about how the design balanced realism with creativity. Whilst the basis of my reflections were understood by the group, they offered a different understanding of the situation. It was noted that;

“It’s been really good that you were able to take our ideas and turn them into something that looked doable, I think we needed that confidence to know it was possible to get a site, mess around with it and come up with something which makes us think ‘yeah, we can do that’.”

(F, November 2014)



Figure 49: Street perspective of Elbow Street design  
(Author's own, July 2014)

The way that this workshop gave the MUCH group the confidence to be creative demonstrates a notable nuance of the group’s sense of limits that I had not previously considered. By proposing a design that showed, in small ways, how their discourse could challenge the cohousing orthodoxy, this practice reframed what could be considered ‘sensible’, thus shifting the sense of limits experienced

by the group. By showing that challenging the cohousing orthodoxy could still be viable, this workshop reinforced the notion that other changes would also be possible, opening the door for future innovation by the group. If I had undertaken a more experimental practice that challenged the group more, there would be a risk that it would have made the design too unconventional to allow the group a confidence that their discourse was 'doable', and thus would have reinforced the sense of limits the group already experienced.

On reflection, I understood that my critique was influenced by a disconnect between the group, who would continue to develop, and my own role within the group, which was coming to a close. I knew that this workshop would be my last design engagement with the MUCH group before my other academic responsibilities would begin to take precedence, and had developed an expectation that this practice would provide resolution - generating a model for cohousing that the MUCH group could take forward without my input. This was an expectation that was self-imposed, and not shared with the group. For the MUCH group, the workshop was simply as another juncture on their expansive collective journey. In discussion, a member of the group argued that;

"I think you are right, this is an opportunity to do something really incredible, and I'm ready to move to the next stage, but we need to have the confidence to evaluate, come up with ideas and know that it was a process we could engage in. It's good but I don't want to stop now."

(F, November 2014)

Having built confidence and expanded their sense of limits, the group were prepared and capable of being more critical of the field of cohousing, and more willing to explore ways they could define for themselves what they wanted to achieve and how their community could support that to happen. One member of the MUCH group noted that;

“... I would say we have been conservative about what we have looked at. It might be that we stay with something conservative ... I think it would be really good for us to have that challenge and for you to make those architectural challenges because I think we can hear them now in a way we perhaps wouldn't have been able to before.”

(F, November 2014)

Back at our initial meeting, the MUCH group's primary concern was to gain enough expertise about architecture to retain their agency when working with an architect. Their goal was the ability to define a community that fulfilled their desires, based on a fear that an architect might prevent them from realising their vision. This workshop and the overall trajectory of our collaboration show that the MUCH group did gain architectural expertise, but not in the ways they had assumed at the outset of our relationship. Whilst I was able to teach the group some technical knowledge about the practices an architect would develop, this was not how the group derived most of their agency. Instead, the MUCH group were enabled to embrace another element of architectural expertise – the capability to be creative in imagining possible spatial futures.

By slowly expanding the discourse through different forms of interaction, the group became increasingly capable of overcoming their sense of limits and thus confident in creating and proposing ideas that were new and innovative. This was not a skill I taught them, but a confidence they gained through the generation and manifestation of their creativity in our practices. Through this, the group understood that their vision could not be realised by disempowering the architect, and instead saw that our collaboration had liberated us both to be creative.

Although this marked the last of my collaborations with MUCH for the time being, I was confident that the changes I had observed within the group would be beneficial both for MUCH and their future architect. Our collaboration demonstrated how MUCH had embraced the qualities of spatial agency – an understanding of architecture as more than buildings and the inclusion of non-

architects within architectural practices. Our collaborations showed how developing trust, negotiating different views and enabling the creativity of the group to emerge were all the product of our design practice. These qualities enabled the MUCH group to define their own vision by challenging what cohousing was, and what role they could have in its creation

## **7.5 Conclusion: The spatial agent's role in overcoming a sense of limits**

The practices in this chapter identifies a trajectory of interactions through which myself and MUCH gradually expanded the boundaries of our discourse, pushing back against the sense of limits that was impeding our ability to be creative. This in itself was a shared endeavour, as it was only in relation to each other that we were able to understand the limits we placed on our own creativity, and thus provide the impetus to challenge them.

MUCH, like most cohousing groups were novice developers with no experience of being client. As a result, they initially adopted a stricter sense of limits about what it was possible to create than many other clients, who are aware of what is possible but commercially constrained in the choices. The paradox that the group desired to be creative but experienced a strong sense of limits was an unexpected finding of our collaboration, but one that reinforces the need for the architect and cohouser to reject normative notions of 'client' and 'professional' in order to realise the potential that cohousing provides.

My collaboration with MUCH shows how developing a relationship based on spatial agency enabled us to build off each other's creativity. In sharing our experience in cohousing and life, we were collectively able to generate ideas and proposals for action, from which I was able to utilise my architectural skills in order to spatialise and share them through design. This creation was only affective when people believe it can exist, an aspect of my practice that I had initially underestimated. At first, my focus was on challenging the group and myself to react against the cohousing orthodoxy – a drive to break from

standardised elements of cohousing that I understood as passively accepted within the field. It was only later that I understood that my role was not just expanding the limits we experienced, but must also to ground my response in these limits to make these ideas acceptable.



## **8 Discussion: Cohousing as a medium of spatial agency**

This chapter identifies the key findings developed through the collaboration with MUCH, and the implications of these findings on the wider fields of environmental gerontology, spatial agency, architecture and cohousing.

The chapter begins by reiterating the aims of this study and summarising the findings that have emerged through the research. Following this, an expanded definition of spatial agency is examined and developed. This examination explores the suitability of the theories of Giddens and Bourdieu as a means of developing practices, and offers a shared reflection on the overall process by myself and the MUCH group.

Next, the implications of these findings are discussed, linking back to the conditions and theoretical fields developed in part one of this thesis. This is split into four parts – Architecture, Cohousing, Environmental Gerontology and Age-Friendly Cities. First, this chapter outlines the links between cohousing and the profession of architecture to suggest challenges and opportunities for architects to engage in spatial agency. Second, this chapter examines the contributions the study makes to the emerging discourse of cohousing. Third, it explores the implications of spatial agency in relation to environmental gerontology, focusing on the links between the creation of cohousing and the discourse surrounding ‘ageing in place’ and ‘moving on’. Fourth, the chapter expands upon the relationship between the approach developed in this thesis and the model of age-friendly communities. The chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of this research and proposing areas in which further research should take place.

### **8.1 Summary of findings**

This thesis set out to understand the limitations and opportunities of using spatial agency as the basis of the architect’s role in older people’s cohousing.

This was investigated in two phases; a theoretical expansion of spatial agency in relation to existing examples of cohousing, and a practical testing of this expanded approach through a live collaboration. The hybrid theory of Giddens and Bourdieu developed in Part One provided not just a means of accounting for the limits to spatial agency, but also a way of understanding and responding to the successes and failures of our collaboration in which new limitations and opportunities arose. This process used the theoretical expansion of spatial agency reflexively as a means of improving the practices we developed based on the increasingly nuanced characteristics that our collaboration had to account for. Figure 50 shows a matrix of the three limitations of spatial agency identified in relation to cohousing, the proposed expanded model generated through the creation of a hybrid theory of structuration, and the emerging qualities of these that were generated through practice.

	<i>Limitation of spatial agency</i>	<i>Proposed expansion of spatial agency</i>	<i>Emergent qualities generated through practice</i>
Mutual Knowledge (Chapter 5)	Narrow concept of expertise in Giddens perpetuates expert/non-expert dynamic	Development of mutual knowledge that recognises that architect and co-houser are both expert, but within different 'fields of discourse'	Development of mutual knowledge requires the generation of trust, as practices need to overcome pre-determined expectation of the architect-cohouser relationship
Negotiated Habitus (Chapter 6)	Motivation is viewed as having a marginal impact in Giddens' theory of agency	Introduce notion of habitus to understand how individuals are motivated, and design as a means of negotiating these desires	Identified the limits of consensus decision-making, which is the predominant form of negotiation in cohousing. Practice with MUCH proposes an alternative form of negotiation, based on the accommodation of difference in space.
Shared Creativity (Chapter 7)	Spatial agency constrained by Giddens' limited conception of creativity	Conceptualise design as a shared discourse, in which the interaction between differently motivated, differently expert individuals enables creativity to emerge.	Recognition of a 'sense of limits' within a shared discourse that prevents innovation. Demonstrates need for propositions to balance innovation with a grounded realism in order to contribute to the expansion of the collective discourse, and thus increase opportunities for creativity

Figure 50: Matrix showing the expansion of spatial agency approach\_ (Author's own)\_

The three limitations of spatial agency in relation to cohousing, and how they were overcome through the collaboration with MUCH, can be summarised as follows.

### *Mutual Knowledge*

The first limit of spatial agency that this research identified in relation to cohousing was the lack of recognition for the cohousers expertise. Bourdieu's concept of 'fields' was identified as a means of overcoming this, as it allows a broader conception of expertise. In the collaboration with MUCH, this was interpreted as the development of practices in which both myself (in the role of architect) and the cohousers valued both our own knowledge, and the knowledge that the other held. Whilst we eventually reached this point, the collaboration demonstrated the complexity of fulfilling this aim. Spatial agency attempts to make a clean break from the traditional architect, even as far as to reject the title of 'architect' in favour of 'spatial agent', but this was an idea at odds with the pre-existing expectations of the architect-cohouser relationship held by the MUCH group. The group experience of working with professionals generated a perceived oppositional relationship between the expert and novice, and thus a fear that the architect could impose ideas that the group did not agree with because their lack of expertise would leave them unable to challenge the architect. As a result, realising a collaboration based on spatial agency first required the generation of two inter-related forms of trust: First, the MUCH group needed to trust that the practices we developed would value the cohousers expertise; and second, the group needed to trust that my own motives were genuinely grounded in supporting their goals.

### *Negotiated Habitus*

The second limit of spatial agency was the lack of recognition that an individual's agency is determined by their own desires and dispositions. Bourdieu's theory of habitus provided a means of exploring how these qualities affect the actions individuals take, and as a result our collaboration sought to find ways to negotiate the different habitus of the group through a process of developing propositions. This was challenged by the MUCH group's decision to

initially adopt a consensus decision-making approach as a means of negotiating the different desires of the group within a single, collective response. Our examination of consensus showed the limits of this approach, both in terms of the subjugation of individual desires in favour of a single collective identity that was deemed more feasible, and through the second-guessing of this consensus through situations that generated ‘groupthink’. In response to this, we developed an alternative understanding of negotiation, based on the accommodation of different views through the spatial proposals. By integrating the different habitus of the group, our practices enabled the group to generate and consider ideas that could not be have been realised through consensus.

### *Shared Creativity*

The third limitation identified in spatial agency was the narrow conception of creativity provided by Giddens’ structuration approach. Through the recognition that the cohousers were differently expert and motivated by their own habitus, I sought to challenge the notion that the architect was the sole creative agent in cohousing. I did this by understanding the MUCH group as a field of discourse in its own right, constructed through the interactions between differently expert and differently motivated individuals. This discourse would provide opportunities for the MUCH group and myself to be mutually enabled by each other’s knowledge, desires and ideas, and thus propose actions that could not be realised autonomously. Despite this, the collaboration with MUCH highlighted a further limit to our creativity – a ‘sense of limits’ that moderated the actions that were emerging in our discourse based on a desire to be ‘realistic’ in our proposals. Once conscious of this, we developed practices that aimed to expand the discourse of the group in response to the limits we identified in each other. This demonstrated the need for the architect to balance the expansion of the shared discourse of the group with a need to demonstrate the feasibility of the discourse, slowly expanding what responses are deemed to be legitimate.

## **8.2 Expanding spatial agency**

The collaboration that was developed with MUCH confirmed many of the limitations to Giddens’ model of structuration that are hypothesised in Chapter

Three, but also demonstrates limits of Bourdieu's theories as a means of overcoming constraints in spatial agency.

### *Giddens*

The limitations of Giddens' approach were demonstrated within the collaboration through the constraining situations we faced together. The collaboration initially confirmed the expert-novice power dynamic within Giddens' model, the underrepresentation of the cohousers individual motivations, and the expectation that creativity was the sole domains of the architect. Whilst these suggest that Giddens' model is useful in understanding how individuals act within society, it also shows the limits of this in relation to the aims of spatial agency. Spatial agency demands that practitioners think differently about society and challenge the normative relationships they find themselves in, such as the relationship between architect and user, or between money and power. Whilst Giddens shows how people do act in society, it is through the interrogation and expansion of this that the opportunities to expand the agency of the individual are created.

### *Bourdieu*

The addition of Bourdieu to the model of spatial agency produced a number of benefits to my practices, but could not be understood as the panacea for the limits that Giddens generates. Bourdieu's theory of practice and habitus provides an important analytical tool that enabled me to account for why people act the way that they do, but it provided little means of converting this insight into positive practices. To do this, I had to push beyond the implied limited of Bourdieu's theories, utilising his means of analysis as a mode of production.

For example, Bourdieu's concept of a 'sense of limits' provides a useful way of understanding the barriers to creativity that the group faced, but not a means of responding to these limits. Bourdieu uses this to demonstrate the existence of doxa, and thus show why the existing power structures within society endure. For Bourdieu, the actions of individuals are constructed through society and

thus are not pre-determined. Despite this, the educational and cultural institutions that make up society also prevent a discourse emerging about matters that might challenge the status quo. As a result, Bourdieu's theory shows both how individuals have the freedom to act, but that individuals are not predisposed to act 'above their station'. Bourdieu's aims as an academic were not to enact change himself, but to uncover the power relations that were within the doxa and make them explicit to those who were limited by them so that they were empowered to act against them. This was mirrored in the collaboration with MUCH, in which the identification of the collective sense of limits provided the opportunity and impetus to push back against them creatively.

Bourdieu shows why the world stays the same, with a hope of making people want to change it. The collaboration sought to take this next step by exploring what changes could be realised based on the motivations, knowledge and capabilities within the group and the constraints that the group would have to operate within.

### **Cohousing and spatial agency**

The conception of the spatial agent's role undertaken in my collaboration with MUCH goes beyond the brief description of cohousing presented in *'Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture'* (Awan et al. 2011), which applies the model of the spatial agent designing 'with' cohousers. The collaboration with MUCH expanded this understanding of the cohousing spatial agent in two ways. First, our work rejected the traditional architect-client relationship that is limited to the creation of cohousing as a building. The broader conception of spatial agency we adopted promoted the possibility of engaging in the initial group definition stage of the MUCH community, and thus expand the realm of possible practices. Second, our collaboration adopted a flexible approach that allowed participation to take the form of designing 'for', 'with' and 'from' the cohousers. The use of this broader, flexible interpretation of participation enabled us to be more responsive to the situations we encountered, each of which called us to take of different roles based on the contributions we felt able to make. This aligns with the conditions of third wave cohousing, which is

driven both by the socially innovative first wave ('with' and 'from') and the pragmatically driven second wave ('for' and 'with').

### **Reflections on spatial agency**

The use of spatial agency to inform the collaboration with MUCH led to the adoption of a non-linear practice, in contrast to the predictability that the architect as a building designer seeks over both the interactions they have and the outcomes they produce. The trajectory of our interaction could only be discovered by experiencing the limits and opportunities that our practices created. The value of this form of emergent, reflexive practice was noted by some of the MUCH group during a focus group at the conclusion of our collaboration.

“I think the existing model by the UK Cohousing Network is very linear. What we have done, and you've gone along with, is what living labs call 'user driven open innovation'... It's that situation where the expert is there with the users at every phase of the development... I think the model we have is an organic model where you start to grow something, which can be more innovative. The reiteration process is crucial.”

(M, November 2014)

The link between the limited role of the architect as a form maker and the quality of the designs that other communities produced was also noted.

“One of the outcomes of the two cohousings I have seen is that the architecture is very uninspiring. I think both [cohousing community 1] and [cohousing community 2]<sup>22</sup> are boring as hell as buildings... [they are] pokey and horrible and not very good.... It makes you think ‘Christ, who designed this? They must be useless’ and if we can’t do better than that, it’s a poor do. I think the point of where the architect gets involved is the key question, and I assume they did that linear model where they just showed up to design it.”

(F, November 2014)

This highlighted one of the key qualities of spatial agency – that the architect’s design capabilities are limited when they act autonomously. It is not just for the cohousers benefit that the interactions between architect and cohouser occur, but it also increases the architect’s capabilities and potential for creativity. This challenges the existing field of cohousing, which presents the architect-client relationship as a means of increasing the capabilities of the cohouser by forcing the architect to compromise.

As a result of our contingent, non-linear collaboration, I was able to increase the capabilities of the MUCH group in ways that the traditional architect relationship would not allow. The main contribution generated through our collaboration was the exploration and definition of the group’s vision for themselves and their community. The group recognised that the sense of limits they experienced were not bounded to the deterministic way that cohousing had been promoted to them. Instead it was limited by a lifetime of experiences that constitute their habitus, overriding other desires they held.

---

<sup>22</sup> The names of these cohousing communities have been removed due to the nature of the criticisms.

“I think our rationality was bounded by what we know about housing as being individualised, and ‘my own broom cupboard’ thinking. I think it takes a while to unpick that, and figure out where are our boundaries are.

(F, November 2014)

By adopting spatial agency as a methodology, our collaboration was able to reconceptualise cohousing as a medium of shared creativity, rather than an architectural or experiential product. This was not achieved through a single conscious act of rebellion from the cohousing orthodoxy, but a gradual but concerted effort to identify and overcome barriers to our creativity. As a result, the MUCH group did not perceive cohousing as a way of achieving a predetermined set of relationships through formal expression, nor spend their efforts in trying to align their expectations to the model that cohousing could offer. Instead they developed their own model, exploring the relationship they desired to have with each other and the wider city, and from this proposing both formal and non-formal interventions that could enable this to happen. Rather than seeking to find consensus around the cohousing orthodoxy, spatial agency enabled MUCH to develop their own, shared discourse, a common understanding of how they wanted to live, regardless of the expectations of the normative cohousing model.

“The whole point for me was that we needed to come on the journey as well. What I thought was fascinating... was how much we know and have a common understanding of what it is we are talking about.”

(F, November 2014)

### **Citizen-Expert/Expert-citizen**

Although creativity was an aspect of our collaboration I have explored in length in this thesis, spatial agency also enabled me to contribute to the MUCH group in other ways. These can be summarised by Till’s proposal that the architect acts

as both a ‘citizen-expert’ and an ‘expert-citizen’ - an agent defined not only by their profession but their whole self (Till 2005:33).

As a citizen-expert, I was able to support the group by offering my own knowledge about the development process. Examples of this included creating a toolkit for assessing the suitability of a site, travelling with the group on case study visits and signposting the group to different resources based on their needs. Another way that I was able to support the group was by contributing to meetings with town planners, regeneration officers and housing associations. Whilst the MUCH members led these meetings, my attendance enabled me to ask more specialist questions based on my own expertise, and provide a translation of the responses in a way that would allow the MUCH group to contribute. These all occurred before the point in the process where guidance like the UK Cohousing Network Toolkit (2012) suggests employing an architect, yet provided the MUCH group both with a means of expediting their internal process and expanding their capabilities.

One of the last tasks that MUCH asked me to undertake was to review a statement of intent produced by a housing association, which set out the recruitment process for an architect if their project were to develop. I elaborated on the implications of the agreement and suggested some questions to raise with the housing association that they might want to clarify, and thus make an informed decision as to how to proceed. This final act identifies an important rationale for spatial agency – breaking the self-perpetuating cycle of traditional architecture. Were I not working with MUCH, they might have ended up employing an architect based on the linear, pre-determined model of practice that they came to understand as flawed.

As an expert-citizen, I was able to contribute to the group by providing a different perspective to the group’s activities and decisions. Whilst a large focus of my interaction with MUCH involved generating a trusting relationship, I retained a position on the fringes of the group. This was partly because of my obvious distinction of not being a future resident of the community, but also

because I shared few experiences that the rest of the group had by virtue of my age. Rather than a limit, this detachment enabled me to provide a counterbalance to the trajectory of the group:

“It’s useful to test things out on somebody younger. In some ways you are the cultural stranger to us. You are an outsider. I think it’s really valuable to have a cultural stranger with us, noticing things we miss, it’s been really helpful.”

(F, November 2014)

The group’s recognition of my role as a ‘cultural stranger’ is notable because it shows that my contribution was not just as an architectural expert but as an individual, and thus showed how my habitus of experiences (architectural or otherwise) could affect the group. A good example of this was the creation of a model during the Albany Road design charrette<sup>23</sup> based my recognition that the group needed something tactile to give them confidence that they were progressing. Whilst any architect could make a model, it was specifically because I had interacted with the group as an individual that I observed the need to go to this extra effort as a means of supporting the group.

The practices developed with MUCH suggest a series of wider implications within the key fields of discourse that we were situated within. The next section discusses how this thesis contributes to the wider fields of architecture, cohousing, environmental gerontology and age-friendly cities.

### **8.3 Wider implications of spatial agency**

#### **The architectural profession in cohousing**

Spatial agency challenges the architectural profession to seek primarily social goals, but in doing so raises an important question - How can the spatial agent viably operate within a capitalist development system? Whilst my adoption of spatial agency has been grounded in a desire to interrogate the limitations of the

---

<sup>23</sup> As documented in section 5.3 of this thesis (p 136)

architectural profession, Till and Schneider suggest that spatial agency is predicated on a two-fold shift “...not just on the side of the architectural profession but also in those who commission architecture” (Schneider and Till 2009:108). Cohousing provides a good example of both of these shifts and shows how the conditions for spatial agency can be realised on the fringes of the current system of architectural commissioning and practice.

The MUCH group did not have the financial backing which would normally be a pre-requisite for employing an architect. Whilst they had wealth within their assets that would eventually enable them to build their own homes, at the outset of our relationship the group were not in a position where they felt comfortable putting this capital at risk. This presents a barrier for the spatial agent - for a group to feel confident enough to invest thousands of pounds of their own capital into the project, the assumption is that they know what they are getting into, and thus the project has been defined. For the first year of our collaboration, the MUCH group didn't have a bank account.

The MUCH group had expressed gratitude that I was able to support them, but the type of support they received is an engrained characteristic of third wave cohousing. My availability to the group was only made possible by the support of Manchester City Council, who supported the research both financially in part because they recognised the potential benefits to the city in promoting new ideas like older people's cohousing. Herein lies the potential for the spatial agent as presented by the third wave of cohousing – the support of partners like charities, local authorities and social housing providers based on a recognition that housing, ageing and social care are important societal issues that require innovative solutions.

Examples such as MUCH and Loppukiri show potential for state support into cohousing, but there are also examples in which support for cohousing has been integrated into wider urban regeneration strategies. A number of German municipalities, notably Hamburg, have provided support for cohousing groups through advice services, financial backing and land acquisition. These services

are provided on the understanding that cohousing not only provides housing, but also contributes to the strategic goals of the local government, such as creating stability within neighbourhoods with a highly transient population (Ache and Fedrowitz 2012:407–9). Similarly in the UK, the Homes and Communities Agency provide state financial support for developments which are deemed to be of social, economic or environmental importance (including housing schemes) through the ‘Community Right to Build’ initiative (Homes and Communities Agency 2013). The Community Right to Build is notable because it allows the applicant to receive funding before they have developed their proposals, thus providing groups with capital to spend on professional assistance (such as by employing an architect) at an earlier stage of development.

Whilst the state and charitable organisations present a temporary opportunity to increase the viability of the spatial agent approach in cohousing, there is equally potential for entrepreneurial architects to develop their own means of acting as spatial agents, much like Durrett and McCamant have achieved. Their practices demonstrate how they created the conditions to become the architects they wished to be. The emergence of specialist cohousing developers in the US provides another opportunity for the architect to engage in the early phases of cohousing development. Companies such as ‘Cohousing Solutions’ based in California offer one-stop services which include both architectural expertise (feasibility studies, building design, participatory design consultancy, master planning) as well as developer expertise (site purchasing, project management and financial services) (Cohousing Solutions 2015).

The critique of second wave cohousing developed in this thesis proposes that the architect-developer is incentivised to mitigate against risk and conflict in the development process, which is achieved by reducing the agency of the cohousers. The collaboration with MUCH offers an alternative understanding of conflict, focusing on finding ways to negotiate the divergent views through design. There are challenges and opportunities of this approach. By employing a less controlling position our practice was able to broaden the understanding of

what cohousing could be – an innovation necessary if cohousing is to become more than a niche endeavour. Equally, my time commitment working with MUCH was greater than most professionals would be able to justify financially. Although it was not my aim to be time efficient, the operationalisation of the spatial agency approach within this context requires further investigation.

The issue of risk is an important element of both cohousing and the future of the architectural profession. The RIBA *‘Future for Architects’* report (RIBA 2010) suggests that many professionals fear that they will continue to be marginalised as clients increasingly opt to mitigate risk through contractor-led ‘design and build’ or PFI contracts, and that the risk averse position taken by architects would further diminish their ability to influence the development process (RIBA 2010:12–13). Cohousing, however, will always be underpinned by risk, and thus presents opportunities for the spatial agent to practice in situations that mainstream commercial practice deem unpalatable. The high failure rate of cohousing communities is both a symptom of the lack of support available to prospective cohousers, but also a reason why professional support cannot exist without challenges to the existing financial models within architecture and development. Within this gap lies the potential for new business opportunities for architects willing to embrace and monetise the risk involved in cohousing.

Although the financial implications of spatial agency are important in understanding how these forms of practice can grow, it would be remiss not to mention the personal fulfilment I gained from working with MUCH. Like many professions, architecture is attractive because of a promise to provide a means of generating income whilst also enabling the individual to make a positive contribution to society. Although architecture can make this contribution whilst still abstracting those who benefit from it, the example of MUCH shows how spatial agency enables a very direct relationship between architect and citizen to emerge. I took great enjoyment from working with the members of the MUCH group, who inspired me both personally and professionally. I was enthused by the opportunity to work with a group of people seeking to make positive changes to their community, to innovate and to strive for social justice.

Whilst financial necessities that underpin the architect as a paid labourer remains vital in sustaining and supporting professionals, other forms of benefit should not be ignored. The personal satisfaction I gained as a spatial agent should not be understood as fortunate by-products of the process, but as a central reason for undertaking socially and political engaged design practices.

### **The emerging cohousing discourse**

The practices I developed alongside MUCH are situated within the emerging third wave of cohousing, which represents an important point within the development of the cohousing discourse. For much of its history, the purpose of ‘cohousing’ as a term and a model was the ability to generate power by coalescing around a shared identity. By describing cohousing as set of architectural spaces and expected relationships, proponents of cohousing could differentiate their approach from other models of cohousing. This allowed national cohousing associations to form, prospective cohousers to legitimise their endeavours, and expertise to develop within the field. Whilst this has undoubtedly been of value in the early stage of the cohousing field, it now acts as a barrier to innovation. For all the efforts of policy makers, practitioners and the research community, cohousing remains incredibly niche, difficult to develop and limited to those with the financial means to develop it. The emerging third wave of cohousing offers an opportunity to question these orthodoxies, including the role of the architect within cohousing.

This is not to say that the knowledge or ideas generated in the history of cohousing should be forgotten. My practices with MUCH can be seen as building upon some of the characteristics of the first and second waves of cohousing. My embedded, long term relationship with the group was in some ways reminiscent of the first wave of cohousing, in which architects were often members of the cohousing group. By understanding my role as being beyond the design of built form, I was able to integrate design knowledge into all manner of activities, much like the first wave pioneers. Similarly, my role took influence from the facilitatory role developed in the second wave of cohousing,

providing development and pragmatic support in order to help the group to make faster progress. Despite adopting ideas from the first and second wave, our collaboration also took a broader message from these two waves – an understanding that the field of cohousing changes to meet different contexts and cohorts, and that challenging the cohousing orthodoxy was necessary for each previous wave to become established.

The collaboration with MUCH highlighted a number of issues that were unique to the third wave of cohousing, particularly in response to the age of the members within the group. These included different perceptions about future health needs, a desire to contribute to the city as a means of remaining personally fulfilled in retirement, and a desire to take risks that the group felt unable to take when they had other responsibilities. These are all issues that helped us to explore innovative new ideas that shift the discourse of what cohousing was for and how it could be realised.

The field of cohousing, like all other fields, has the potential to be changed by the actions of agents who practice within them. Understood in this regard, my practices with MUCH contribute to the continual re-imagining of the cohousing field. It is only by demonstrating how groups like MUCH have challenged the cohousing orthodoxy that others within the field are able to learn from it, therefore enabling the third wave of cohousing to meet the challenges posed by the new cohorts and conditions in which it is created.

### **Cohousing and environmental gerontology**

The collaboration with MUCH demonstrates how cohousing challenges the current dichotomy within environmental gerontology between ageing in place and moving on in later life. Rather than making a choice between these two positions, the MUCH group integrated concepts from both approaches within our collaboration.

In some ways the MUCH group were ‘moving on’, literally leaving their current homes in search of “...meaningful new stimulations and roles...” to expand their

agency as they grew older (Kahana and Kahana 1983:211). Equally, the group were concerned with retaining links to their local communities (physically and socially) and creating a feeling of belonging – issues more commonly used to describe the pull of ageing in place (Rowles 1983:114).

The MUCH group could neither be described as ageing in place nor moving on, and instead demonstrate a third approach – creating place. The MUCH group were seeking meaningful new roles in society, but these were not pre-defined benefits of moving into a new property. Our design approach enabled interactions through which these roles were defined spatially, and through which the cohousers could construct a new place for themselves in the city. Similarly, the group constructed a sense of belonging by creating a community that embedded their own ideals, working alongside the community they would hopefully share it with. The process of co-creation and negotiation results in neighbourly bonds on the first day after moving in, perhaps even surpassing the bonds that would have existed between the individual had they remained in their previous home. Although time consuming, the process was important because it provided space for the MUCH group to construct a vision and an attachment to their new community, and so mitigating the pull from both staying put or moving home.

The ability to construct place offers potential for older people to overcome the limitations of both ageing in place and moving on, enjoying both adventure and security, change and comfort. Despite this, the existing constraints experienced by older people still apply to cohousing. In their study of older people's experiences of home and community, Peace, Holland and Kellaher suggest that, "For most of our respondents, moving or not moving was bound up with uncertainty about their future selves." (2006:48). The influence of uncertain futures highlights the importance of spatial agency within older people's cohousing, as the collaboration with MUCH was grounded in the proactive exploration, creation and testing of possible futures generated by the cohousers. The spatial agency approach we employed offered opportunities to explore possible futures because the focus was not purely limited to defining the

architectonic form the community would take. Our approach instead focused on desired experiences and relationships, sometime explicitly imagining how these desires might change in the future. Rather than placing the onus on the individual to imagine whether staying or leaving their home would provide them with a better future, a spatial agency approach to cohousing enables the individual to explore and construct a future they actually desire, and to examine whether this vision is achievable.

### **Spatial agency and Age-Friendly Communities**

Although developed through cohousing, the spatial agency parameters of mutual knowledge, negotiated habitus and shared creativity are applicable to other areas of ageing discourse and practice.

Despite their different scales, the collaboration I developed with the MUCH group shared many characteristics with the WHO concept of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. By undertaking a collaborative approach based on spatial agency, the MUCH group increased their capability to explore and self-determine the social and physical environment they wished to grow older in. These same qualities of participation, independence and self-fulfilment form the basis of the WHO concept of ‘active ageing’, upon which the Age-friendly Cities model is founded (World Health Organisation 2002:12–13). In this regard cohousing can be understood as a microcosm of the age-friendly city.

The actions of the MUCH group can thus be understood as a positive response to a shared recognition that many older people lack the agency to affect changes in their community and city, but that through mutual effort they could challenge this condition.

There are strong parallels between my role as a spatial agent with MUCH and the emerging role of architects in the creation of age-friendly community projects. This is something I have experienced first hand, having worked as a researcher on a series of age-friendly projects across Manchester alongside my practices with MUCH.

Collaborations between local government, academic institutions and housing providers in Manchester has led to the development an age-friendly design-research model in the city, combining expertise in architecture, urban design, community development and gerontology to support older people to affect social change in their neighbourhoods. An example of this is the Manchester Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods (MAFN) project – a collaboration between Manchester School of Architecture, Southway Housing Trust and Age-friendly Manchester that I worked on alongside my cohousing research. Working in 4 neighbourhoods across the city, the aim of this project is to empower local communities to develop ways of reducing social isolation amongst older people. This is achieved by enabling older people to determine the appropriate responses for their own communities. My role is to work with a local partnership (residents, volunteers, service providers and civil servants) to co-create and deliver a neighbourhood action plan, which acts as a medium of interaction between the different partners, including myself and the MAFN team as active participants. This project exemplifies the application of spatial agency in wider fields of ageing design-research, as it seeks to include citizens in processes they are usually excluded from and consider the knowledge of the architect beyond the production of built form. As a result, the same issues of trust, negotiation and creativity that influenced my practices with MUCH can be observed within the MAFN project.

### *Mutual Knowledge*

Much of our initial work focuses on developing trust with residents and institutional partners, who often doubted our motives. Our role as architects made this challenging, as many of the residents assumed our research was a precursor to an imposed regeneration to their community. This was overcome by demonstrating our motives through our actions – showing that we valued the different knowledge within the partnership by showing how their ideas could affect us, and being honest about our own constraints as researcher that might affect the courses of action we were taking. Whilst some of the partnership were

initially sceptical, people became increasingly receptive as they saw their ideas included in the action plan, or projects they helped develop start to emerge. Trust was also developed between our various partners who collaborated in creating the neighbourhood action plans, which we developed through various design workshops. This enabled the emergence of systemic change by challenging existing relationships in the community that had led to marginalised older people, such as some parties perception of older people as passive 'service users' rather than active, creative individuals.

### *Negotiated Habitus*

By developing a partnership approach, the MAFN project also shows the role of spatial agency in the negotiation of different views and dispositions. Not only are there more individual participants than in cohousing, but the diversity of individuals is also more pronounced. In addition, communities are underpinned by existing power relationships that were not present in the cohousing group, such as the competing desires and capabilities of citizens, community groups, civil servants and service providers. These different views were explored and negotiated by sharing the different perspectives within the action plan, but also through the direct interactions of a board we established in each neighbourhood. These boards were resident-led, but included members of the local council, police, health services, housing providers and voluntary sector. The board would review the action plan and any projects proposed by residents, and in doing so make explicit the different ideas and concerns derived from their various roles. By acknowledging the competing concerns of the group, the board are able to negotiate solutions that respond to the needs of each party.

### *Shared Creativity*

Finally, the MAFN project is focused on enabling creativity through a shared discourse. Because of the scale of the neighbourhood this discourse is embodied in the neighbourhood action plan, which we use to facilitate workshops with the partnership. This approach enables any participant to access and understand the views of the whole community, and thus provide stimulus for individuals to propose creative solution to make their neighbourhood more age-friendly. As

with the MUCH group, the MAFN team and my roles as spatial agents are not detached from the creative process. We are tasked with distilling the experiences and ideas into a form that can enable individuals to be creative, and we are participants in the workshops where residents discuss and create proposals for their local community. Through this partnership and these workshops, our focus is expanding the discourse of what is possible within each neighbourhood, and exploring the new areas of discourse with older people and other partners to generate innovative new propositions for their community.

#### **8.4 Limitations of study and recommendations for further research**

There are a number of limitations to this study, each of which suggests areas for further research

##### *Language and translation*

One of the initial challenges of this study was that much of the early academic literature about cohousing is not available in English. Literature regarding second and third wave cohousing is widely available, but the early first wave examples for Scandinavia preceded widespread interest in cohousing from the English speaking world. Whilst research does exist from this period, it has not been directly translated from the native Danish or Swedish. Whilst some researchers from this period such as Dick Urban Vestbro continue to produce new work in English that looks back at the first wave of cohousing, the lack of access to the primary sources was limiting.

A valuable area of future research would be to revisit and translate literature from the first wave period. This would be particularly useful in the context of third wave cohousing, which shares a similar interest in cohousing as a means of realising social aims.

### *Transition to building design phase*

Whilst contingency was a key methodological component of this study, it also generates some of the more significant limitations of this study. From the outset, the trajectory of this research was dependent on a myriad of factors outside of my control, not least the progress of the MUCH group themselves. For example, the pace of development within the timescale of this study meant that I could not explore the transitions between the project-defining stage and the later building design phase, or how the MUCH group could negotiate a position with other parties like developers.

A worthy area for further research would be to study the transitions from project development to building design phases of cohousing. A study of this nature would be valuable in the development of spatial agency as a practical approach to cohousing, and one that I hope to collaborate with MUCH to undertake once they have progressed to this stage in their development.

### *Replicability*

The focus on a single practice-based case study was a necessary decision in order to explore the interactions within spatial agency to the extent required, but is limited by the specific context it was practiced in. My collaboration with MUCH is not directly replicable, as any small variation in the participants could have altered the trajectory of our practices. The findings of this research could, however, be interrogated through further collaborative design-research in cohousing. Whilst there is potential for additional research regarding the 'standard' cohousing client (relatively wealthy, resident-led groups with no/little development experience), I recommend that further research should focus on different cohort groups and their responds to the participatory processes of cohousing. Examples worthy of further examination could include an artificially convened cohousing group that was initiated by a developer; a group with existing development expertise; and a cohort with lower incomes.

### *Baseline knowledge*

One of the main characteristics of the collaboration I developed with MUCH was the shared journey of discovery we took based on a similar baseline knowledge regarding cohousing. Through this process I have obviously increased my knowledge and expertise about cohousing, and thus if I were to start practicing with a different cohousing group there would be a different power dynamic than the one I experienced with MUCH.

Further research into the limitations and opportunities presented by the experienced cohousing spatial agent would make a valuable contribution to knowledge. Durrett argues that experienced cohousing architects need less participation with cohousers due their expertise (Durrett 2009:94–98), and would be interesting to test whether this assertion is true within a more contingent, spatial agency approach. A large portion of my practice with MUCH were based on identifying challenges to our agency that, in retrospect, you would expect to experience in the majority of cohousing groups. Starting from this new baseline presents opportunities to further expand and investigate the potential of cohousing and the architect's role within it. This could focus on producing the practical efficiencies necessary for the spatial agent to be employed as paid professionals, or overcoming the challenges of high failure rates and long development cycles experienced by prospective cohousing groups.

### *Dissemination*

Finally, it is important to address the disconnection between the practical resources available to cohousing groups and the emerging research regarding cohousing. Documents such as the UK Cohousing Toolkit (2012) had a considerable influence on the MUCH group, perpetuating an approach that has, to date, achieved mixed success in the UK. The decentralised, bottom-up nature of cohousing places an onus on researchers to communicate the knowledge and ideas that emerge through their studies, recognising that cohousing groups have few means of accessing traditional academic outputs. A future aim derived from this research is the production of an alternative cohousing toolkit, which

presents the opportunities of spatial agency to both new cohousing groups and the architects they seek to collaborate with.



## 9 Conclusion

This thesis began with a quote from Lydia, a member of the MUCH group.

“I think one of the challenges for all of us, and you, is to come up with our own ageing, and not be influenced by images of what older people look like. We are using each other to future-scope ourselves, in space. That’s really exciting! The ability to let us consider our ageing as a positive asset rather than a form of disability where we would all be stuck in those awful chairs. It’s been a real challenge because we all have these different ideas of futures, and the shape and space needs to mirror and enable that.”

(November 2014)

This quote was taken during a focus group near the end of our collaboration, and thus describes the architect-cohouser relationship we had gradually created based on the interpretation of spatial agency we had developed. In many ways, this quote sums up the key argument that this thesis aimed to test - how the architect’s interactions with older cohousers can mutually increase the capability of both parties.

Lydia recognises three main elements of the architect-cohouser relationship in cohousing that we developed through our collaboration. First, there is an understanding that the architect’s role should not be limited to that of the building designer. She identifies the shared task of “...coming up with our own ageing...” - an act that is both propositional, but whose creation is not limited to the architectonic outcomes. This broader conception of architectural knowledge was matched by an expanded understanding of the knowledge held by the MUCH members themselves, and a recognition that our different expertise could contribute to the empowerment of each other.

Second, Lydia recognises the need for us to define a vision for ageing by “...future-scope ourselves, in space.” This acknowledges the link between the

social and spatial definition of cohousing community. The collaboration between myself and MUCH from an early stage of the group's development enabled the simultaneous interactions between social and spatial definitions of their community to emerge. Unlike the examples of cohousing documented in *'Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture'* (Awan et al. 2011:122–23), the focus of our participation was not to design a better building, but to define what the community wanted to achieve and how this could be enabled spatially.

Thirdly, Lydia recognises that the diversity of the MUCH group and the role of space in negotiating ideas. She notes that "...we all have these different ideas of futures, and the shape and space needs to mirror and enable that." Whilst MUCH shared a core desire to live together, the rationale for this and the vision each member held were based on their own personal desires and dispositions. The process of exploring different futures was challenging because it opened our process to contingency and disagreement, but equally it created the necessity for the group to interrogate their own vision for ageing in greater detail, which became one of the key successes of our collaboration. Our collaboration developed practices that sought to negotiate different individual's visions through spatial proposition, rather than de-spatialised attempts to form consensus prior to the initiation of a design phase.

The overarching position developed through my collaboration with MUCH is that agency should not be understood as a capability to act, nor as a capability to choose between multiple possible actions, but instead as the ability to act creatively. This interpretation of agency is grounded in the individual's vision, which is actively expanded through their collaboration with others to develop possible actions that the individual could not have conceived alone. Spatial agency is a useful starting point to understand how the architect can increase opportunities for themselves and others to enact creativity, but this thesis highlights how an exploration of the specific conditions of practice is necessary to realise this. The opportunities for spatial agency identified within cohousing and tested with MUCH provided a means of developing creative practices, but are not necessarily transferable to other fields in which spatial agency could be

practiced. It was through the interrogation, expansion and testing of spatial agency that the opportunities for creativity emerged. Spatial agency can therefore be seen as a means of developing creative practice, rather than a model of practice itself.

This research prompts me to suggest that the future of older people's cohousing is closely tied to the premise of spatial agency. Despite the interest in cohousing within policy and the media, successful examples in the UK remain scarce. The barriers that face cohousing communities are significant, and require new ways of considering cohousing. The current DIY approach that has been adopted within the field will also put cohousing groups in direct competition with more agile and better resourced commercial competitors, particularly in desirable urban sites (Scanlon and Arrigoitia 2015:119). It is perhaps time to question whether the 25 dwelling, single site cohousing community that is promoted within mainstream cohousing literature is viable, and instead move to investigate innovative, UK specific responses to the definition, design and development of cohousing. There are many potential directions that the emerging third wave of cohousing might develop in response to this opportunity. The development of smaller communities of 6-8 dwellings might be more suitable to the UK development climate, or cohousing groups could seek to integrate into larger developments produced by commercial developers. Herein lies an opening for the spatial agent – the chance to investigate these constraints and opportunities at an early stage in a manner that is both spatially propositional and cognisant of the wider development constraints that cohousing groups face.

In light of the challenges facing cohousing groups in the UK, it is necessary to reconsider one of the central tenets of cohousing – the need for traditional architectural intervention through the creation of new or renovated buildings. A potential exemplar for this is 'N Street' in Davis, California – a somewhat unremarkable suburban street that later morphed into a cohousing community. The project started in 1979 as a shared student house, with the residents deciding to buy the neighbouring property and removing the garden fences

between them (Meltzer 2005:61). The community grew gradually as like-minded individuals purchased or rented properties, removed the fences between them and started to engage in the social activities that were occurring within the community. Eventually, some of the neighbours who already lived on the street decided to join in as well. The community grew to 17 properties, including one property that was converted in 1991 to house a communal dining room and kitchen (Meltzer 2005:63). Rather than a new organisation, the N Street group was constituted as a series of individuals, and didn't need large development loans or legal structures to become established. The community embraced contingency, growing based on the constraints and opportunities they experienced – a constant process of negotiation and creativity that responded to the changing needs, desires and membership of the group. After 20 years the group did eventually constitute themselves as a legal entity to enable them to redevelop elements of the site as a collective (Meltzer 2005:64).

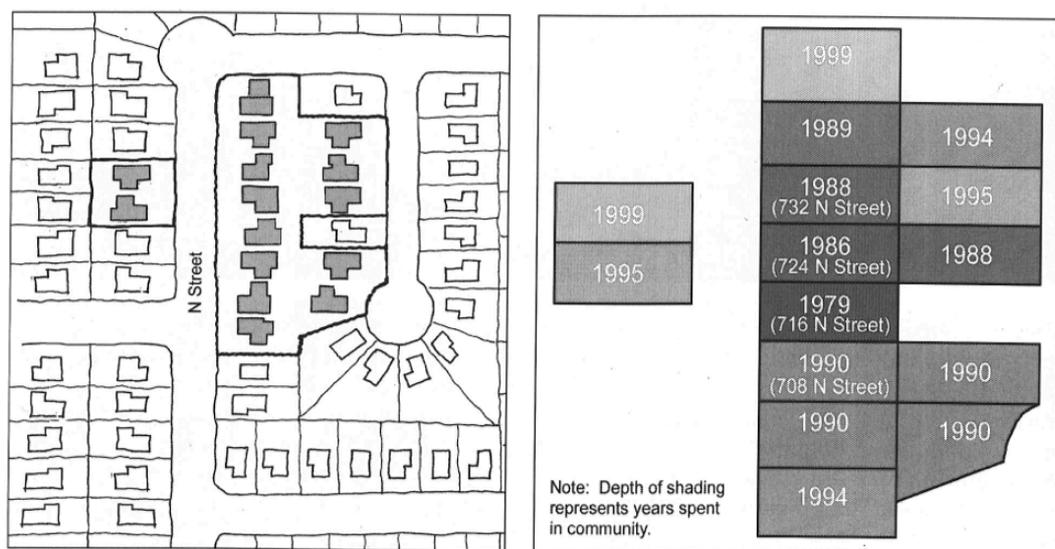


Figure 51: Site Plan and development timeline for N Street Cohousing in Davis, California, USA (Meltzer 2005:62)

It might appear counter-intuitive to conclude this thesis by identifying the potential of an approach where the architect is not present. After all, the “...normal modus operandi for an architect is to add something physical to the

world” (Awan et al. 2011:31). Rather than seeing a lack of opportunity for the architect in a project like N Street, this thesis highlights the potential for the opposite to emerge. By rejecting the implicit link between architect and the building design, spatial agency provides a way for the architect to contribute to a group like N Street, whose project has obvious spatial implications and whose development might have evolved differently had they collaborated with an architect.

The collaboration with MUCH demonstrates the contribution of design and architectural knowledge in supporting the broader definition of a cohousing group. Design practices were used as a promotional activity, a means of building stronger relationships within the group, defining and negotiating a collective vision for their community and interrogate how this could be achieved through the creation of a building. Embedding architectural practices into the early stage of the MUCH group’s development allowed the group to expand their discourse to recognise the spatial implications of all their action, and create conditions through which creative spatial ideas could emerge prior to the traditional building design phase. The application of spatial agency that has been developed and tested in this research suggests an opportunity for the architect to expand the territory of their practices. Even though cohousing is recognised by Awan et al. as a site of spatial agency, the collaboration with MUCH represents an expansion of the role of the architect cited in their examples. By using spatial agency to develop a methodology grounded in negotiation and creativity, this collaboration also demonstrates further opportunities for the architect to practice within fields where the production of architectonic form is not the primary concern, such as in retro-fitted cohousing like N Street, or at a community scale such as the Manchester Age-Friendly Neighbourhood project. Whilst these might have designed outcomes - the traditional territory of architectural practice - the novel contribution of spatial agency is the opportunity to use design as a medium of a wider social creativity.

Spatial agency is grounded in a call for architects to realise their role as socially engaged practitioners. At the outset of this research, I saw spatial agency as an

opportunity to fulfil this role by making a positive contribution to a project that I felt was important to society. Prior to my collaboration beginning, I understood the capability to affect change based on my social, political and ethical dispositions as the liberating aspect the spatial agent role. Whilst this was the case, I was equally affected by my interaction with MUCH. Their dedication and vision inspired me not just from a professional standpoint, but as an individual trying to find ways of realising a just city. It is through these affective interactions that the wider social creativity of our practice could emerge. I was not working for the group to propose ideas I thought would make their lives better, nor working with the group to gain their views about how to improve their experience of the city. Creativity emerged from our interactions, as we mutually broadened each other's understanding of the possible impact we could make. Through exposure to each other's ideas and expertise, our collaboration enabled us to identify the limits to our agency and push back against them. The expansion of the territory of our architectural practices coincided with the expansion of our habitus; the augmentation of the group's collective knowledge and desires with our own. Herein lies the potential of spatial agency – the opportunity for the architect not just to realise their own ideals through architectural practice, but to mutually create a social vision with others citizens that would otherwise be hidden to both.

# Bibliography

- Ache, P., and M. Fedrowitz. 2012. "The Development of Cohousing Initiatives in Germany." *Built Environment* 37(3):395–412.
- Age Friendly New York City. 2009. "Age Friendly NYC: Enhancing Our City's Livability for Older New Yorkers." Retrieved May 21, 2017 ([www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/age\\_friendly/agefriendlynyc.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/age_friendly/agefriendlynyc.pdf))
- Age UK. 2016. "Ageing in Squalor and Distress: Older People in the Private Rented Sector." Retrieved May 21, 2017 ([http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Housing/Ageing in squalor and distress report, October 2016.pdf](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Housing/Ageing_in_squalor_and_distress_report,_October_2016.pdf)).
- Anderson, L. 2006. "Analytic Autoethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(4):373–95.
- Arrigoitia, M. F., and K. Scanlon. 2015. "Co-Designing Senior Co-Housing." *Urban Design Group Journal* (136):28–30.
- Atkinson, W. 2011. "From Sociological Fictions to Social Fictions: Some Bourdieusian Reflections on the Concepts of 'institutional Habitus' and 'family Habitus.'" *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 32(3):331–47.
- Awan, N., T. Schneider, and J. Till. 2011. *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. London: Routledge.
- Bendixen, E. L. et al. 1997. "Saeetedammen I 25 Ar." Retrieved November 11, 2016 ([http://dammen.dk/Jubilaebumsbog\\_Dammen.pdf](http://dammen.dk/Jubilaebumsbog_Dammen.pdf)).
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge. Retrieved (translation: Richard Nice).
- Brenton, M. 1999. "Co-Operative Living Arrangements among Older Women." *Local Environment* 4(1):37–41.

- Brenton, M. 2008. "The Cohousing Approach to 'Lifetime Neighbourhoods.'" (29). Retrieved July 4, 2014 (<http://www.housingcare.org/downloads/kbase/3140.pdf>).
- Brenton, M. 2011. "Cohousing: Supporting Local Network in Old Age." Pp. 115–24 in *Cohousing in Britain*, edited by Sarah Bunker, Chris Coates, Martin Field, and Jonathan How. London: D&D Publications.
- Brenton, M. 2012. "Lessons from Dutch Senior Cohousing." Retrieved January 11, 2016 ([http://cohousing.org.uk/sites/default/files/sr\\_coho\\_study\\_day\\_feb\\_2012-1\\_mb.pdf](http://cohousing.org.uk/sites/default/files/sr_coho_study_day_feb_2012-1_mb.pdf)).
- Brenton, M. 2013. "Senior Cohousing Communities – an Alternative Approach for the UK?" Retrieved March 11, 2017 (<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/senior-cohousing-communities-full.pdf>).
- Buffel, T. 2015. "Researching Age-Friendly Communities: Stories from Older People as Co-Investigators." Retrieved January 5, 2017 (<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/brochures/Age-Friendly-Booklet.pdf>).
- Chang, H. 2008. *Autoethnography as Method*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Chatterton, P. 2013. "Towards an Agenda for Post-Carbon Cities: Lessons from Lilac, the UK's First Ecological, Affordable Cohousing Community." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37(5):1654–74.
- Coates, C. 2011. "From Co-Housekeeping to Cohousing." in *Cohousing in Britain*, edited by Sarah Bunker, Chris Coates, Martin Field, and Jonathan How. London: D&D Publications.
- Cohousing Solutions. 2015. "Services." Retrieved December 7, 2015 (<http://cohousing-solutions.com/services/>).

- Crabtree, L. 2016. "Build It Like You Mean It: Replicating Ethical Innovation in Physical and Institutional Design." Pp. 157–74 in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*, edited by Ruth Lane and Andrew Gorman-Murray. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cross, N. 1999. "Design Research: A Disciplined Conversation." *Design Studies* 15(2):5–10.
- Cruz, T. 2005. "Tijuana Case Study Tactics of Invasion: Manufactured Sites." *Architectural Design* 75:32–37.
- Cruz, T. 2011. "Latin America Meander: In Search of a New Civic Imagination." *Architectural Design* 81(3):110–18.
- Dovey, K. 1999. *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Durante, C. 2011. "Active Citizenship in Italian Cohousing: A Preliminary Reflection." Pp. 307–22 in *Everyday Life in the Segmented City*, edited by Camilla Perrone, Gabriele Manella, and Lorenzo Tripodi. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Durrett, C. 2009. *The Senior Cohousing Handbook*. 2nd ed. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishing.
- Durrett, C., and K. McCamant. 2011. *Creating Cohousing*. Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers.
- Ellgaard, H. 2010. "John Ericssongaten." Retrieved May 2, 2017 ([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/37/John\\_Ericssongatan\\_2010.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/37/John_Ericssongatan_2010.jpg)).
- Ellis, C., T. E. Adams, and A. P. Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research* 36(4):273–90.
- Evans, R. 1995. *The Projective Cast: Architecture and Its Three Geometries*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fromm, D. 1991. *Collaborative Communities*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

- Gemeenschappelijk Wonen. 2017. "Community Addresses." Retrieved May 19, 2017 (<http://www.gemeenschappelijkwonen.nl/?choice=88/>).
- Giddens, A. 1976. *New Rules of Sociological Method*. London: Hutchinson & Co.
- Giddens, A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and the Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Handler, S. 2014a. "A Research & Evaluation Framework for Age-Friendly Cities." Retrieved January 19, 2017 ([http://www.micra.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/A Research and Evaluation Framework for Age-friendly Cities\\_web version.pdf](http://www.micra.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/A%20Research%20and%20Evaluation%20Framework%20for%20Age-friendly%20Cities_web%20version.pdf)).
- Handler, S. 2014b. *The Alternative Age-Friendly Handbook*. Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Library.
- Heywood, F., C. Oldman, and R. Means. 2002. *Housing and Home in Later Life*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hill, J. 2003. *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users*. London: Routledge.
- Holtzman, G. 2010. "Introduction to Cohousing and the Australian Context." Retrieved April 4, 2014 ([http://synthesisstudio.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Introduction-to-Cohousing-and-the-Australian-Context\\_\\_GiloHoltzman\\_2010.pdf](http://synthesisstudio.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Introduction-to-Cohousing-and-the-Australian-Context__GiloHoltzman_2010.pdf)).
- Homes and Communities Agency. 2013. "Community Right to Build Route." Retrieved April 22, 2015 ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/364136/2014.07.16\\_-\\_clps\\_-\\_crtb\\_prospectus\\_updated.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/364136/2014.07.16_-_clps_-_crtb_prospectus_updated.pdf)).

- Horelli, L., and K. Vespa. 1994. "In Search of Supportive Structures in Everyday Life." Pp. 201–25 in *Women and the Environment*, edited by Irwin Altman and Arza Churchman. New York: Plenum Press.
- Kahana, E., and B. Kahana. 1983. "Environmental Continuity, Futurity and Adaption of the Aged." Pp. 205–30 in *Ageing and Milieu: Environmental Perspectives on Growing Old*, edited by Graham D. Rowles and Russell J. Ohta. London: Academic Press.
- Kollektivehus NU. 2010. "The Swedish National Association - Cohousing NOW." Retrieved May 11, 2017 ([http://www.kollektivhus.nu/english/index\\_eng.html](http://www.kollektivhus.nu/english/index_eng.html)).
- Korpela, S. 2012. "Casa Malta: A Case Study of a Contemporary Cohousing Project in Helsinki." *Built Environment* 38(3):338–45.
- Krokfors, K. 2012. "Co-Housing in the Making." *Built Environment* 38(3):309–14.
- Lancaster Cohousing. 2015. "Lancaster Cohousing: Our Vision." Retrieved May 2, 2015 (<http://www.lancastercohousing.org.uk/About/Vision>).
- Lawton, P. M. 1998. "Environment and Ageing - Theory Revisited." Pp. 1–31 in *Environment and Ageing Theory: Focus on Housing*, edited by R Scheidt and P Windley. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Lietaert, M. 2007. "The Growth of Cohousing in Europe." Retrieved May 12, 2015 (<http://www.cohousing.org/node/1537>).
- LILAC. 2014. "Briefing Sheet: Affordability." Retrieved June 2, 2016 (<http://www.lilac.coop/documents/public/112-briefing-sheet-affordability-1.html>).
- Lindhe, J. 2010. "8 House / Big." Retrieved February 4, 2017 ([http://www.archdaily.com/83307/8-house-big/8h\\_image-by-jens-lindhe\\_01-2](http://www.archdaily.com/83307/8-house-big/8h_image-by-jens-lindhe_01-2)).
- Lipman, A. 1970. "Architectural Education and the Social Commitment of Contemporary British Architecture." *the Sociological Review* 18:5–27.

- Lipman, A., R. Slater, and H. Harris. 1979. "The Quality of Verbal Interaction in Homes for Old People." *Gerontology* 25(5):275.
- Loppukiri Cohousing. n.d. "Briefly in English (Overview)." Retrieved August 22, 2013 ([http://www.loppukiriseniorit.blogspot.fi/p/blog-page\\_1790.html](http://www.loppukiriseniorit.blogspot.fi/p/blog-page_1790.html)).
- Manchester City Council. 2009. "Manchester: A Great Place to Grow Older." Retrieved May 22, 2017 ([http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11899/manchester\\_a\\_great\\_place\\_to\\_grow\\_older\\_2010-2020.pdf](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11899/manchester_a_great_place_to_grow_older_2010-2020.pdf)).
- Manchester City Council. 2015. "Indices of Deprivation 2015 Employment Deprivation." (October). Retrieved April 3, 2017 ([www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/23504/f2\\_indices\\_of\\_deprivation\\_2015\\_-\\_income\\_deprivation.pdf](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/23504/f2_indices_of_deprivation_2015_-_income_deprivation.pdf)).
- Mason, D. 1999. "Skraplanet Unit Backyard." Retrieved May 1, 2017 ([http://l.cohousing.org/dk99/tourpix/SK\\_bkyard.jpg](http://l.cohousing.org/dk99/tourpix/SK_bkyard.jpg)).
- Meltzer, G. 2005. *Sustainable Communities*. Victoria, BC: Trafford.
- Murray, S. 2013. "Design Research: Translating Theory into Practice." Pp. 95–116 in *Design Research in Architecture*, edited by M Fraser. Chichester, UK: Ashgate.
- Newman, R. 2008. "P1020759." Retrieved May 27, 2017 (<https://flic.kr/p/4qMpsd>).
- OWCH. 2016a. "Housing For Women." Retrieved May 2, 2017 (<http://www.owch.org.uk/housing-for-women>).
- OWCH. 2016b. "OWCH in Residence." Retrieved March 3, 2017 (<http://www.owch.org.uk/owch-in-residence>).
- OWCH. 2016c. "OWCH Participation in Design." Retrieved November 12, 2016 (<http://www.owch.org.uk/participation-in-design>).
- OWCH. 2016d. "The Housing Sector and OWCH." Retrieved November 12, 2016 (<http://www.owch.org.uk/housing-sector-owch>).

- OWCH. n.d. "Our Values." Retrieved November 1, 2015  
(<http://www.owch.org.uk/owchpages/policies&procedures/VALUES.pdf>).
- Packer, D. J. 2009. "Avoiding Groupthink: Whereas Weakly Identified Members Remain Silent, Strongly Identified Members Dissent About Collective Problems." *Psychological Science* 20(5):20–22.
- Pateman, C. 1970. *Participation and Political Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Peace, S. 2010. "Introduction: Reflecting on User-Involvement and Participatory Research." in *Reflecting on User-Involvement and Participatory Research*, edited by Sheila Peace and Jonathan Hughes. London: Centre for Policy Ageing.
- Peace, S., C. Holland, and L. Kellaher. 2006. *Environment and Identity in Later Life*. Bristol: Open University Press.
- Peace, S., C. Holland, and L. Kellaher. 2011. "'Option Recognition' in Later Life: Variations in Ageing in Place." *Ageing and Society* 31(5):734.
- Peace, S., H.-W. Wahl, H. Mollenkopf, and F. Oswald. 2012. "Environment and Ageing." Pp. 131–41 in *Adult lives: A lifecourse perspective*, edited by Jeanne Katz, Sheila Peace, and Sue Spurr. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Phillipson, C. 1982. *Capitalism and the Construction of Old Age*. London: Macmillan.
- Phillipson, C. 2007. "The 'elected' and the 'excluded': Sociological Perspectives on the Experience of Place and Community in Old Age." *Ageing and Society* 27(3):321.
- Phillipson, C., S. White, and M. Hammond. 2012. "Age-Friendly Old Moat." Retrieved December 6, 2013  
(<http://www.southwayhousing.co.uk/getattachment/Southway-in-Your-Community/Age-friendly-Neighbourhoods/Old-Moat-Age-friendly-Neighbourhood-Report.pdf.aspx>).
- Pollard Thomas Edwards. 2016. "OWCH." Retrieved November 11, 2016  
(<http://pollardthomasedwards.co.uk/project/owch/>).

- Rendell, J. 2004. "Architectural Research and Disciplinarity." *Architectural Research Quarterly* 8(2):141–47.
- Renz, M. A. 2006. "Paving Consensus: Enacting, Challenging, and Revising the Consensus Process in a Cohousing Community." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 34(2):163–90.
- "Restaurant at John Ericssonsgatan 6." n.d. "Restaurant at John Ericssonsgatan 6." Retrieved May 4, 2017 ([http://www.markeliushuset.se/Markeliushuset/Historia\\_files/droppedImage\\_2.png](http://www.markeliushuset.se/Markeliushuset/Historia_files/droppedImage_2.png)).
- RIBA. 2010. "The Future for Architects." Retrieved October 12, 2013 (<http://www.buildingfutures.org.uk/projects/building-futures/the-future-for-architects>).
- Rowles, G. D. 1983. "Geographic Dimensions of Social Support in Rural Appalachia." Pp. 111–30 in *Ageing and Milieu: Environmental Perspectives on Growing Old*, edited by Graham D. Rowles and Russell J. Ohta. London: Academic Press.
- Ruiu, M. L. 2014. "Differences between Cohousing and Gated Communities. A Literature Review." *Sociological Inquiry* 84(2):316–35.
- Rust, P. C., P. J. Mottram, and P. J. Till. 2007. *Practice-Led Research in Art, Design and Architecture With Support from :*
- Sargisson, L. 2012. "Second-Wave Cohousing : A Modern Utopia ?" *Utopian Studies* 23(1):28–56.
- Savills World Research. 2015. "Spotlight Housing an Ageing Population." Retrieved October 2, 2016 ([http://www.savills.co.uk/research\\_articles/141280/193071-0](http://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/141280/193071-0)).
- Scanlon, K., and M. F. Arrigoitia. 2015. "Development of New Cohousing : Lessons from a London Scheme for the over-50s." *Urban Research and Practice* 8(1):106–21. Retrieved (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2015.1011430>).

- Schneider, T., and J. Till. 2009. "Beyond Discourse : Notes on Spatial Agency." 97–111.
- Schweiger, D. M., W. R. Sandberg, and P. L. Rechner. 1989. "Experiential Effects of Dialectical Inquiry, Devil's Advocate, and Consensus Approaches to Strategic Decision Making." *The Academy of Management Journal* 32(4):745–72.
- Seeds for Change. 2013. *A Consensus Handbook: Co-Operative Decision-Making for Activists, Co-Ops and Communities*. Lancaster: Seeds for Change Lancaster Co-operative Ltd.
- Sewell, W. H. 1992. "A Theory of Structure : Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1):1–29.
- "Shared meal at Saettedammen." n.d. "Saettedammen." Retrieved May 1, 2017 ([http://www.saettedammen.dk/uploads/4/4/9/3/44931215/9760658\\_orig.jpg](http://www.saettedammen.dk/uploads/4/4/9/3/44931215/9760658_orig.jpg)).
- Sivén, K., and A. Takala. n.d. "Kotisatama & Leonsatama, Housing Blocks for the Elderly in Kalasatama." Retrieved November 1, 2015 ([http://www.scandinavian-architects.com/en/siven-takala/projects-3/kotisatama\\_leonsatama\\_housing\\_blocks\\_for\\_the\\_elderly\\_in\\_kalasatama-48662](http://www.scandinavian-architects.com/en/siven-takala/projects-3/kotisatama_leonsatama_housing_blocks_for_the_elderly_in_kalasatama-48662)).
- Springhill Cohousing. 2017. "Springhill Cohousing - Welcome." Retrieved April 14, 2017 (<http://www.therightplace.net/coco/public/#history>).
- "Springhill Cohousing." n.d. "Springhill Cohousing." Retrieved May 15, 2017 (<http://www.architype.co.uk/img/projects/springhill-co-housing/3.jpg?152>).
- Stevens, J. 2013. "Community-Led Housing for Older People and the Community Right to Build." Retrieved September 19, 2015 ([https://www.housinglin.org.uk/\\_assets/Resources/Housing/Support\\_materials/Viewpoints/HLIN\\_Viewpoint4o\\_CRTB.pdf](https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Viewpoints/HLIN_Viewpoint4o_CRTB.pdf)).
- The Cohousing Association. n.d. "The Cohousing Directory." Retrieved January 10, 2017 (<http://www.cohousing.org/directory>).

- Till, J. 1998. "Architecture in Impure Community." in *Occupying Architecture*, edited by Jonathan Hill. London: Routledge.
- Till, J. 2005. "The Negotiation of Hope." in *Architecture and Participation*, edited by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till. London: SNOP.
- Till, J. 2007. "Architecture and Contingency." *Field* 1(1):120–35.
- Till, J. 2008. "Architectural Research: Three Myths and One Model." *Building Material* 17:4–10.
- Till, J. 2009. *Architecture Depends*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Tucker, K. 1998. *Anthony Giddens and Modern Social Theory*. London: SAGE.
- Tummers, L. 2016. "The Re-Emergence of Self-Managed Co-Housing in Europe: A Critical Review of Co-Housing Research." *Urban Studies* 53(10):2023–40.
- UK Cohousing Network. 2012. "The Cohousing Toolkit." (March 2012):1–18. Retrieved August 2, 2013 ([https://cohousing.org.uk/files/toolkit\\_march\\_2012.pdf](https://cohousing.org.uk/files/toolkit_march_2012.pdf)).
- UK Cohousing Network. n.d. "Cohousing in the UK." Retrieved January 6, 2017 (<http://cohousing.org.uk/cohousing-uk>).
- United Nations Population Fund. 2012. "Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge." Retrieved April 29, 2017 ([https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Ageing report.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Ageing%20report.pdf)).
- Vandkunsten. 1979. "Boligbebyggelsen Tinggarden, Herfolge." Retrieved (<http://www.tinggaarden.nu/historien-bag-tinggarden.391.aspx>).
- Vestbro, D. U. 2008. "History of Cohousing." 1–11. Retrieved September 2, 2014 (<http://www.kollektivhus.nu/pdf/colhistengo8.pdf>).
- Vestbro, D. U., and L. Horelli. 2012. "Design for Gender Equality : The History of Co-Housing Ideas and Realities." *Journal of Built Environment* 315–35.
- Webster, H. 2011. *Bourdieu for Architects*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- White, S. 2017. "Including Architecture." Pp. 121–34 in *Disability, Space, Architecture*, edited by Jos Boys. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Williams, J. 2005. "Designing Neighbourhoods for Social Interaction: The Case for Cohousing." *Journal of Urban Design* 10(2):195–227.
- Williams, J. 2008. "Predicting an American Future for Cohousing." *Futures* 40(3):268–86. Retrieved January 1, 2016 (<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0016328707001103>).
- Wilton-Ely, J. 1977. "The Rise of the Professional Architect in England." in *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession*, edited by S Kostof. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- World Health Organisation. 2002. "Active Ageing: A Policy Framework." Retrieved May 2, 2014 ([http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO\\_NMH\\_NPH\\_o2.8.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_o2.8.pdf)).
- World Health Organisation. 2007. "Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide." Retrieved April 24, 2017 ([www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global\\_age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf)).



## Appendix 1: Overview of practice

The following list documents all 37 individual practices that constituted the collaboration with MUCH. This does not include interactions that were conducted through either email exchanges or telephone calls.

	<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Initial Meeting	11/2012	Roundtable discussion between the researcher and MUCH founder members about the possibilities of collaborating.
2	Planning meeting for recruitment workshops	02/2013	Short meeting with core members to discuss the design game that the researcher would be running as the second recruitment day
3	Recruitment day 1	17/03/2013	The first of three recruitment workshops featuring a presentation about cohousing, discussion of potential 'dealbreakers' and question and answer session.
4	Recruitment day 2 (Design Game workshop)	28/4/2013	The second of three recruitment workshops. Group discussion followed by Design Game workshop (developed by researcher). 90 minutes design

			game undertaken with 24 people exploring negotiation and the limits of the cohousers creativity.
5	Monthly general meeting	09/03/2013	First general meeting following initial expansion of the MUCH group. Discussion focused on agreeing time scales, administrative structures and how to accept new members
6	Monthly general meeting	21/07/2013	General meeting followed by work plan workshop, in which the group prioritised tasks and agreed to form a series of sub-groups
7	Monthly general meeting (Identifying Skills workshop)	05/08/2013	General update followed by skill identification workshop. Group skills audit through which the relationship between the need for knowledge and the fear of expertise as a disempowering force was discussed.
8	Monthly general meeting	01/09/2013	General update meeting, followed by review of possible sites to investigate, and the process through which these were assessed.
9	Consensus decision-making training	05/10/2013	Externally facilitated training session in which the group first

			adopted a consensus-based approach to collective decisions.
10	Monthly general meeting	06/10/2013	A review of the consensus workshop, followed by discussion regarding recruitment, membership and agreeing the legal entity of the group.
11	Monthly general meeting	03/11/2013	Workshop to review the work plan that had previously been developed, and updates on the financial and legal sub-groups.
12	MICRA cohousing seminar	16/12/2013	Seminar organised by the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), featuring presentations from Maria Brenton from Older Women's Cohousing (OWCH).
13	Planning for design workshop	19/12/2013	Meeting with 2 members of the 'site and design' subgroup to discuss how to develop a set of design criteria, through which the storyteller workshop was developed.
14	Monthly general meeting (Storyteller workshop)	05/01/2014	General update followed by storyteller workshop. The narrative based workshop explored non-visual representation and scenario

			testing, which led to the creation of the group's first 'design criteria' document.
15	Meeting with Triangle Architects	13/01/2014	Visit to Triangle Architects studio in Manchester to discuss cohousing with the director Tim Wallbank.
16	Monthly general meeting	02/02/2014	A review of the decision making processes within the group, and discussion of proposals by the communications and legal sub-groups
17	Albany Road design charrette	13/02/2014	Interpretation and revision of design criteria created in in the storyteller workshop through collaborative design exercise, leading to questions about the relationship between ownership and agency.
18	Monthly general meeting (Albany Road charrette review)	01/03/2014	General update from the subgroups followed by design crit based on the Albany Road design charrette.
19	Lancaster Cohousing visit	04/2014	Field trip to cohousing community with 2 members of MUCH, which led to a discussion about the potential challenges of

			using consensus decision-making within the design process.
20	Monthly general meeting	06/04/2014	Update from legal, communications and recruitment sub-groups. Followed by discussion about the role of professionals and a presentation by the researcher about different types of development contract.
21	Monthly general meeting	04/05/2014	General update from subgroups followed by a workshop exploring the groups interpretation of sustainability
22	SATCHEL trip to Helsinki, Finland	06/05/2014-10/05/2014	Visit to Helsinki as part of the SATCHEL research network with members of the MUCH group and Age-Friendly Manchester. Included a tour of Loppukiri and workshops at Laurea University. Included meeting with Loppukiri architect Kirsti Siven.
23	SATCHEL skype meeting	23/05/2014	Skype meeting MUCH and other members of the SATCHEL research network to discuss a future visit to Finland.
24	Great Places meeting	30/05/2014	Meeting with Development Manager at Great Places Housing

			Association to discuss MUCH group's plans and the potential role they could have in the development process.
25	Monthly general meeting (field trip review)	07/06/2014	General update followed by field trip review workshop. This explored MUCH member's perspectives of their various field trips, leading to recognition of a series of previously unspoken critiques of existing cohousing communities.
26	Elbow Street site evaluation visit	06/2014	Visit to Elbow Street with three members of the site and design sub-group to undertake site analysis and discuss thoughts about the plot and surrounding area.
27	Monthly general meeting (Elbow Street review)	05/07/2014	General updates from sub-groups, followed by group review of Elbow Street charrette.
28	MUCH social	14/08/2014	Informal meal at a MUCH member's house
29	SATCHEL planning meeting	19/08/2014	Meeting between MUCH members and Age-Friendly Manchester to plan SATCHEL visit to Manchester in October

			2014.
30	Monthly general meeting	10/09/2014	Update from sub-groups. Discussion about of the site analysis toolkit prepared by the researcher, and how the group were to manage the site evaluation process.
31	SATCHEL workshop	23/10/2014	Design workshop with members of the SATCHEL research network. Workshop developed in collaboration with Masters of Architecture (M.Arch) students at Manchester School of Architecture, based on the creative negotiation of design ideas as an alternative to client-side consensus decision-making. Followed by group meal.
32	Madlab/Manchester Community Reporters	24/10/2014	Visit to MadLab Maker Space and Manchester Community Reporters to explore other citizen-led projects in the city, as part of the SATCHEL visit to Manchester.
33	Focus group workshop	24/11/2014	A roundtable discussion between the MUCH members and myself that reflected on the process that had been developed and how it

			had changed their perceptions about cohousing and their practices.
34	Monthly general meeting	10/02/2015	General updates from sub-groups and discussions about tenure, facilitation and management structures.
35	Regeneration meeting	27/03/2015	Meeting between two MUCH members, the researcher and a regeneration manager from Manchester City Council to discuss potential development opportunities
36	SATCHEL meeting in Finland	11/05/2015- 13/05/2015	Final meeting of SATCHEL network in Helsinki, Finland. Workshops included review of learning to date and planning for future collaborations.
37	Contract review meeting	10/02/2016	Meeting with two MUCH members to review contract offer provided by a housing association, and to identify further questions the group might want clarity on.





## **Appendix 2: Transcript of focus group**

*Held with 7 MUCH members in November 2014, reflecting on the process the group had made to date and their thoughts on the practices we had developed.*

Researcher:

We have been meeting for nearly 2 years now... that's slightly scary! I thought this would be a good opportunity to reflect on the process we have undertaken thus far and perhaps think about the next stages. I have spent the last couple of weeks going through the workshops we have done, perhaps with a slightly more critical eye than I did at the time. I'd really like to go through in order, to see what your reflections are of the process, would that be ok?

All:

Yes

Researcher:

To be clear, there might be points in this discussion where you want to be critical of the methods we have undertaken. Please don't be afraid to do so! Let's start at the very first meeting we had back in 2012, with what was then the 'core group'. [F1], can you tell us a bit about why that group formed, and what your core motives were at that stage?

F1:

OK. A number of us had talked about what we want to do in our later years... It was kind of prompted by the experience of my parents who bought a house my mother's two younger sisters. The four of them lived happily ever after in what we used to call a 'geriatrics commune' in Suffolk. When we would talk about what we wanted to do, people would say 'that sounds like a good idea', but we didn't know what we wanted.

One of the real triggers was an article in The Guardian on a Saturday about the architects from the states who were in Britain to promote some workshops about cohousing in London, and we thought that would be a good fit for what we wanted as older people. We thought that was a model which might work for us. We sat in the pub after a walk the day after the article was published, and we just got a few people together to talk about it. There was 5 or maybe 6 of us at the time.

We started talking about it, and then wanted to get more people and start doing something about it, but we kept getting stuck. We went to the conference, we talked about it for 2 years, we went to Lancaster to look around for a bit before they had moved in, we looked on the websites. We had done a lot of pre-work to get our heads around it. In the process of that, we got to the point where we decided if we were going to do it.

We had one meeting about 18 months before we had our initial workshops. And then we went and did more work, and then we decide to put on the workshops at Inspire and that was when we met you. And the rest is history!

Researcher:

That's great, thank you. I think this I something I have learned about you, like your aunts and the geriatric commune, you are responding to positive experiences rather than reacting against something negative. I thinks driving a lot of your decision making.

F2:

I think from the perspective of somebody who joined the group by invitation that was something that I picked up on too. From very early on, what was made clear was that it was going to be an intentional community. I think it was [F3] who showed some slides that said what cohousing was not. It's not a care home, it's not sheltered housing. I was very impressed – I was thinking 'this is a huge job'. I wrote down something that [M1] said at the meeting. He said 'If this fails,

we will still have gone further than anyone else because nobody else is doing this.' He was relentlessly upbeat.

M1:

Was I?

F2:

You probably don't remember saying it, but I wrote it down. That I think is one of the key things. How we work through all this grinding stuff, and some of it really is grinding, is because the vision of a 'can-do' culture of living differently as older people. Not being consigned to the care-home or wherever.

Researcher:

So [F4], you weren't in this core group at the beginning, what were your first thoughts and experiences of the group. What made you interested in cohousing?

F4:

I became interest in this sort of think in 1968 and I've talked about it on or off ever since then, the idea of a group for friends within a supportive environment of some kind. I have had a couple of my family who have been living in a cohousing situation in Stroud since 2002, so I was very familiar with that kind of thinking. I was part of a group of people who were thinking about it, but it collapsed I think because I was the only older one in the group. The others got bogged down with family and children largely. They didn't have the energy to do it. I heard about this through a friend of [F3], and I just continued to worm my way into it.

Researcher:

So our initial meeting in town. What did you hope to get out of it? What were your expectations of when we had our first meeting?

M1:

Well, I suppose I knew quite a lot about what architects do. I worked in physical and economic development for years, I dealt with them a lot, had a lot of arguments with them! My expectation was on the positive side. Having a level of expertise to visualize concepts that might come up about the way they wanted to live, or the spaces we could do it in. I think we are all capable of articulating that, but we certainly can't visualise it, or visualise it in a professional sense that could get it built. For me, it was just such a surprise that through a contact I learned about this architect post graduate who had an interest in exactly what we were looking at, in terms of age-friendly issues. I thought, if we can't find some way of making it work, it would be such a lost opportunity.

Researcher:

So onto the recruitment workshops at Inspire, and we will focus on the design game with the wooden blocks if that's OK with you. It was perhaps one of the first opportunities to work collaboratively with each other in a creative way. There were quite a few little bits of conflict within the groups, but there were also some ideas or concerns raised that we stayed with the group and affected the thinking. Reflecting back on that process now, do you think it was useful, or was it a bit too 'pie in the sky'?

F2:

I remember that after the workshop some people thought that they weren't being listened to. I think I drew some latent tensions for some people. I think behind the collaborative work and the blocks and model trees are principles that we hold dear. This is something we are still trying to refine, with some people thinking that certain subjects weren't being given enough attention. I enjoyed the collaborative process. I think the choice for people is to either give up, or carry on. Speaking personally, I think all the processes we have done have been difficult, but they have made me think – what comes next.

F5:

I think it drove us to think 'ok, how would we manage that.' What it throws up is that you can't move forward with those tensions in the group. From that, we really invested in the consensus decision-making model which gave us a framework to overcome these issues... otherwise you spend the time thinking 'nobody is listening to me anymore.'

Researcher:

So who initially suggested the consensus decision making?

F1:

We heard about it at the workshop in London. The architect was talking about process, and she said you need to find a way of making decisions or you are never doing to get anywhere, and Lancaster said that again very loudly – people will just get turned off if you cant decide anything.

F3:

Just going back – we thought we could do it all in one sessions. We thought we could just tell everybody what it was all about and people would say 'yeah, that's good I'll join'. It was only really while we were there that we realized people would need more time to think about it. Looking back we were quite naïve. I think it was as good as we could do at the time, but it was such a new idea for people, and I think there was a bit of anxiety. You are asking someone if they want to completely change how they want. I think we did quite well to get anyone join at the end of it!

F1:

I think there was a lot of people who emotionally liked the ideas, but practically they weren't thinking about them selves. Its like [F4] said, people then think about their children, or their careers. They don't have the headspace, or capacity, or emotional energy to do something like this. By its like they are supporting us – a lot of people there were out chums, and I think they wanted to

know what we were doing but they were never really going to join us. I think we are going to get the same again on our next recruitment drive.

F4:

To go back to the design activity. I came away from the design activity very frustrated. I didn't see the point in it, but then afterwards I realized it wasn't about designing something, it was a 'getting to know you' activity. From that point of view I think it was successful. I had thought that everyone there would be really into cohousing, so I was a bit disappointed that some people didn't seem interested. I do think that activity led the way for us for the further activities. We have revisited all that stuff, and developed some of the ideas we raised there. Ideas did get aired there, and some of them still haven't been resolved, but these are things we still need to think about.

F3:

I think the thing about that exercise was that it gave everyone a new way of working. More people were very articulate, but this was hands on and visual, and fun. I think it gave them an idea that this would be all dull, that we would do practical things. I think if we just did 3 workshops making lists and putting Post-it notes on the wall it would have been a bit too much.

F5:

There was the eating together... the whole thing about mutuality and things like that are very normal, but I think eating together was very symbolic of what we were trying to do.

Researcher:

Lets have a talk about the 'Post-it' note phase of the groups development. The identifying skills, and the future planning workshops. For me, one of the most interesting parts of the process was that future planning workshop, where we decided the order we would complete tasking. So first there was lots about the group deciding things, then working with a land agent to find a site and finally the third phase where you would employ an architect. And initially there was

lots of tasks in the architect phase, but then you realised that all the decisions you wanted to make with an architect would have to come much earlier in the process. I thought it was a really graphic way of showing that the current way of working, as set by the UK cohousing toolkit, isn't really geared up for a cohousing community. I think the standard process wants to make you into a traditional client, but I'm not sure if that's a role that really suits what you are trying to do. I think asking you to be something you are not has perhaps created a power vacuum at times, and its been a bit unclear whether my role is to help you to get something built, or to help you explore ideas.

F5:

Why do you think there is a power vacuum? One of the whole things about this group has been the relationship between a lot of professionals and you as a semi-professional. I think its just an interesting power dynamic.

Researcher:

Yes, I think vacuum was perhaps a crude way of putting it. I think looking back there have been times where I have done things because I felt it could help the group more forward, but that something this has meant that the innovation took a back seat. For example the Elbow Street design, I think it was sensible and looked like the kind of building that a housing association could buy into, but I think it was perhaps didn't do justice to the ideas and creativity that had come from you all.

F2:

Personally I was a bit surprised. I don't think you have done us any disservice. When you turned our thinking into a design on a laptop with the sun going over it, I was blown away. The problem with Elbow Street is where it is, not anything you have done!

I had never thought you should stretch us, we have been working collaboratively. I look forward to what we do next because two things have happened in the last 2 months which have made a huge difference to all our

thinking. You have given us clear guidance about looking for a site, and a brief that we have revised a number of times now. As someone training other people, you have been really helpful. I couldn't even begin to work with a formal architect at this stage, charging by the hour. We have worked with you for a year and a half, and we have maybe given you a little bit back, so don't beat yourself up.

Researcher:

I think a lot of things I have done have been to please you all. As an architect, keeping the client happy is important. Whether that is necessarily the most useful course of action for either of us, I'm not so sure. If you are happy but the design we come up with doesn't achieve all it could, then where does that leave us.

M1:

I wanted to not lose this one thing, which is perhaps a bit academic-y. The one thing that I think you are absolutely right about is that things about the existing model that the UK Cohousing Network use is very linear. What we have done, and you've gone along with, is what living labs call 'user driven open innovation'. It's about the way that products are brought to market... It's that situation where the expert is there with the users at every phase of the development. The reiteration process where expertise is being put into every phase that is crucial. That might be an interesting thing, to link to even the UK Cohousing Network is not organic enough – the process we have is organic, and what you start to grow is actually more robust and innovative.

F1:

Can I build on that. One of the things that occurred to me when you were talking about how we work together. One of the outcomes of the two cohousings I have seen is that the architecture is very uninspiring. I think both [Redacted] and [Redacted] are boring as hell as buildings. The sites are fantastic. Who wouldn't want to live next to the river, but I think the buildings themselves are pokey and horrible and not very good. The problem with sound in the common rooms, it

makes you think 'Christ, who designed this? They must be useless' and if we can't do better than that, it's a poor do. I think the point of where the architect gets involved is the key question, and I assume they did that linear model.

F3:

I'm ready to do some more interesting stuff. It's been really good that you were able to take our ideas and turn them into something that looked doable, I think we needed that confidence to know it was possible to get a site, mess around with it and come up with something which makes us think 'yeah, we can do that.' I think you are right, this is an opportunity to do something really incredible, and I'm ready to move to the next stage, but we need to have the confidence to evaluate, come up with ideas and know that it was a process we could engage in. It's good but I don't want to stop now.

F5:

I think one of the challenges for all of us, and you, is to come up with our own ageing, and not be influenced by images of what older people look like. We are using each other to futurescope ourselves, in a space. That's really exciting! The ability to make us consider our ageing as a positive asset rather than a form of disability where we would all be stuck in those awful chairs, has been a real challenge because we all have these different ideas of futures and the shape and space needs to mirror and enable that.

F6:

I agree with Bonnie that the whole point was that we needed to come on the journey as well. What I thought was fascinating was that in that last workshop with the student architects [SATCHEL workshop] was how much we know and have a common understanding of what it is we are talking about. The young architect had 10 minutes to pull something out and their own ideas. I would say we have been conservative about what we have looked at. It might be that we stay with something conservative, maybe we only have 12 months or something. But I think we are now at a point where you can say 'you don't need a broom cupboard because you'll have a robot hoover or something.' Or whatever. Blue

Sky thinking, I think it would be really good for us to have that challenge and for you to make those architectural challenges because I think we can hear them now in a way we perhaps wouldn't have been able to before.

F1:

I think the process thing is really interesting because everyone I speak to just asks 'where's it going to be'? And you think 'wells that's the easy bit really! Well its not easy, but all this work we are doing now is the important bit. Any fool could buy a plot of land and throw something up on there. We could have done that. If we are going to do something different, what is that difference? Its critically important, particularly when you are trying to engage new people. I think through the work we did with you is part of that, It's partly about the ageing process, and partly about a place to live. Being clear what we actually want, and that's a process we have done with you Mark, is that its partly about the ageing process, and partly about somewhere to live. Its hard to get that in a package people will just be able to pick up.

F5:

As a community developer, the theory of community development I have worked with, we are using in our own groups. I think our rationality was bounded by what we know about housing as being individualized, and 'my own broom cupboard' thinking. I think it takes a while to unpick that, and figure out what can be collective and where are our boundaries. Where is the public space, where is the private space, and am I happy with those boundaries. It's useful to test that out on somebody younger. In some ways you are the cultural stranger to us. You are an outsider. I think its really valuable to have a cultural stranger with us noticing us, its been really helpful."

Researcher:

Going back to the SATCHEL workshop – obviously working with designers who perhaps had less interest in both cohousing and ageing, so what were your reflections on that?

F6:

I think it was hard because of the time, particularly for the Spanish people. I think it leads to you just lobbing jolly ideas in, like having an open front onto the canals in Manchester. Perhaps they have that in Barcelona actually... I think the architects quite rightly engaged with that, but I don't know. Actually, the one thing was about Dementia. We got onto dementia, and the way we were talking it was clear that they [the student] didn't really know much about it. I was a bit surprised really, I would have thought that was something that architects would know more about.

F3:

Not just an architect, you'd expect most people in this day and age to have a good understanding of it, with how much its in the paper

F4:

I think if you haven't been touched by it, if your parents are only 45, then why would it be as big a deal as it is for us. It was fun, but if I'm putting my hand on my heart I'm not sure how useful it was for me.

F2:

I have a slightly different perspective. I think I was fortunate to be in a one to one conversation with an architect to whom I fed in the ideas we had agreed. I think he led a small team and the resulting diagram reflected much of what we have been talking about in the past. There is something about those students, we should be building a relationship. It should be part of the training we can give - when you just told me that, I was shocked.

F4:

I think the interesting thing about the workshop was the bits of the design that I couldn't place. I don't know if there was some miscommunication, or maybe it was an ideas that another of the student had. I think it showed me that you have to be careful, and making sure that we can be dead clear about what we are looking for.

F3:

Yes, you can't make any assumptions that they understand what we are thinking. To be fair, they did have a lot to get through, and only a couple of hours. What got picked up in the end of the day was pretty amazing.

Researcher:

Talking to them [the students] after the session, the main thing they took away from it was this whole different perspective about ageing and what older people are.

F1:

Perhaps, you would hope, that would make them think about all the people they are designing for. Just because we are in a box of a group of people. As you have pointed out, most architects will never get the chance to talk to their end user. I remember my days in planning and there was all this stuff about women in planning, and how women's voice in many ways about how the physical environment is designed is completely lost. But in housing it's them who use it more often and are more often domestically based. They just don't get a look in. It's that kind of issues that professions need to get their heads around, to seek out their views and interrogate them instead of accepting the given... That's something I have gained from years as a community worker! I spent years trying to enable those communities to influence the thing that affects their lives.. and in a sense what we have got here is the opportunity to do that for ourselves, that's why it's so exciting. Who else gets to design their own house, particularly at this stage of their lives. We thought if we weren't going to do it when we were thirty and had the money to be on Grand Designs, we weren't going to be able to do it. But here we are! How exciting is that!

