

evidence. GOING LOCAL

THE LATEST RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS - IN PLAIN ENGLISH

A community-led future?

The recent revival of interest in 'localism' and community-led solutions to housing issues has raised a number of interesting questions. These include the scale and nature of different forms of community-led housing, their relationship to traditional housing tenures and to public policies and private initiatives, the individual and community benefits provided and the factors that account for or limit their success.

At the political level there has been a cynicism about 'localism' policies that appear to operate mainly to rationalise cuts to public expenditure. Implicit assumptions that state withdrawal will stimulate a community response, regardless of the removal of infrastructure support, have been criticised. Uneven outcomes of policies dependent on an active 'civic core' have been rightly condemned.

While these arguments have mainly been concerned with the rhetoric of localism, too little is known about the substance and lived realities of organisations and people in community-led and self-help organisations. The long-standing and international prevalence of many forms of community-led housing highlight the need to detach analysis from specific policy contexts such as 'Coalition Localism'. A wider analysis of factors, including policy, that may support or suppress community-led solutions is called for.

Articles in this Evidence issue draw on recent research that has begun to address these questions and help to provide an agenda for further research.

Richard Lang and David Mullins build on earlier attempts to map the community-led housing sector in England and its relationship to co-operative and mutual housing. While different types of community-led housing have sprung out of different social movements; the co-housing movement (with Danish and North American roots), the community land trust sector (with North American and Scottish strands), the self-help housing sector with roots in squatting and 1970s

urban short-life co-ops; they all exhibit some co-operative principles in their governance. International lessons from public promotion of housing co-ops, such as the Vienna model, are therefore relevant to consider.



Tom Moore and David Mullins highlight the importance of external support in enabling community-led housing to develop successfully. Careful choices are required between different types of promotion and forms of partnership to provide the external resources and support required by fledgling sectors. Conventional notions of 'scaling up' may not fit and alternatives such as 'going viral' may be preferred to maintain the local scale and accountability that provides the unique added value of the sector.

David Mullins and Halima Sacranie take a closer look at the self-help housing sector in the Midlands, the variety of organisations involved and the impact of state funding on growth of the sector. This programme created a space for real alternatives to large scale procurement, bringing distinctive benefits direct to local communities as the by-product of relatively modest property based investment. Asset transfer was seen to enable sustainable growth and community benefits: "So it was all about becoming sustainable also, but not losing the value of what we do." Further evidence on impacts of cooperative models is provided by the Human City Institute's mapping of mutual and co-operative housing in the UK; accounting for the management of 190,000 homes. Evidence of superior housing management performance to other forms of social housing has been validated by regulators.

Other recent research for example on Homesteading, and self-build (see Quick Links) adds to the evidence of motivations, scope and impact of forms of housing that are little known and are not revealed by the conventional tenure based models of home ownership, social and private renting. While still small scale in relation to conventional

tenures, the potential for innovation through community-led solutions appears to be much more than a rhetorical prop to public spending cuts.

Professor David Mullins
Housing and Communities Research Group
University of Birmingham

Quick links:

Crookes, L and Greenhalgh, W (2013) DIY regeneration? Turning empty houses into homes through homesteading.
University of Sheffield and Empty Homes

Wallace, A. Ford, J. and Quilgars, D. (2013) Build-it-yourself? Understanding the changing landscape of the UK self-build market.
University of York and Lloyds Banking Group

The Big Society, Localism and Housing Policy: seminar series with online presentations
 ➔ <http://bigsocietylocalismhousing.co.uk>

Collective custom build: HQN and University of Sheffield event, 27 February.
 ➔ <http://www.hqnetwork.co.uk/events>

Housing as school power

Research by professors Becky Francis and Merryn Hutchings for the Sutton Trust finds that better-off parents use tactics including moving house to ensure their children can go to the 'right' schools.

House purchasing power is used by middle class parents to help their children on the education ladder, the research finds. It is not the first to consider how middle class parents secure their children's educational success. But the authors lay claim to a first by talking to parents from different backgrounds to find out how much they use such strategies. The research showed how much aspirations for equality of opportunity are undermined by some parents' resources.

The research found that middle class parents were generally better informed about schools. Asked if they had ever used strategies about improving their child's educational chances, significantly more parents from high socio-economic groups said they had used strategies that

cost money. These were moving to live in an area that they thought had good schools, moving to live in the catchment area of a good school, and buying a second home to use that address to gain entry to a particular school. Better off parents were also more likely to have hired a private tutor to help their child pass entrance exams.

The dangers of 'parental choice' making inequalities worse is apparent from the research, the authors say. They recommend the government should take strong action on school admissions. That would include requiring schools to publish socio-economic data on who applies and is admitted. They also want lotteries or banding for admissions across local systems.

Parent Power? Using money and information to boost children's chances of educational success

➔ <http://www.suttontrust.com/our-work/research/item/parent-power/>

Scaling up or going viral? How should community-led housing be supported?

Tom Moore from the University of St Andrews and David Mullins from the University of Birmingham assess how small players are developing their role.

Community-led and self-help housing has a long history in England. But it has become more prominent in recent years in response to entrenched housing problems such as homelessness, undersupply of affordable housing, and neighbourhood decline. Community-led housing organisations innovate by prioritising local needs and emphasising community leadership and engagement. This has led to a groundswell of support for community land trusts (CLTs) and self-help housing organisations, providing some substance to policies promoting localism and community empowerment.

Yet to take root these organisations require more than just pledges of support. They need practical and ideological strengthening in order to secure flows of resources, legitimacy, and to ensure local objectives are not overwhelmed by government priorities or partnering organisations. Both are also heavily reliant on the contribution made by volunteers who form, run and manage the organisations. Our new research paper explored the recent growth of CLTs and self-help housing to see which forms of support and partnership have been effective in helping them flourish.

CLTs are set up by local people to increase the supply of affordable housing in communities affected by issues such as gentrification and undersupply of homes, while self-help housing organisations are created to bring empty homes back into use, as well as to tackle neighbourhood dereliction. There are now around 160 CLTs and 110 self-help housing organisations in operation across England, with a total of around 300 CLT homes constructed or in planning. The self-help housing sector aims to bring an additional 1,600 empty homes back into use by 2015. There are, however, key differences in the way each sector has expanded.

The CLT sector has developed a formalised network of umbrella bodies operating at national and regional scales. These professional umbrella bodies can reduce burdens on local projects by providing technical expertise, training and support for housing development, identifying resources, and assisting with organisational management.

This institutional support has been critical to the expansion of CLTs and there are now six umbrella bodies in different regions, supported by a National CLT Network – a membership body that lobbies for CLTs nationally.

While such expansion is sometimes referred to as '*scaling up*', this term has an unfortunate nuance that implies a shift from the community-based local focus that many participants see as the key advantage of these organisations. For instance, some of the professional CLT umbrellas adopt a property development role in their own right, which meets local housing need but alters our understanding of community ownership and control within the CLT sector. CLTs may also form partnerships with technical experts such as housing associations in order to overcome practical problems, gain access to grant funding, and mitigate risk, but the nature of these partnerships may shift decision-making and the economic benefits of schemes away from local communities.

Self-help housing has expanded differently, following an approach known as '*going viral*'. There is a loose network of support, led by a single national intermediary – Self-Help-Housing.Org – that aims to reproduce local projects in different places by brokering partnerships and facilitating local networking and shared practice between projects. This peer mentoring approach aims to preserve local leadership rather than creating larger scale support structures, but also risks overburdening local projects and diverting them from their own work. The framework for bringing empty homes back into use has also begun to incorporate a range of roles and local partners such as local authority empty homes officers, housing associations and other third sector partners, suggesting that self-help housing may begin to follow the pattern of expansion set by the earlier growth of CLTs. This involves the development of new institutional structures and partnerships to provide intermediary support regionally and locally.

State support for self-help places significant faith in the capacity of volunteers, yet support and resources are required to construct an environment in which community-led housing can thrive. This has largely been achieved by CLTs using an active network of intermediaries, housing associations and local authorities involved in their development. Led by their national intermediary, self-help housing groups have largely developed through a blend of peer mentoring and professional support.

However, the shift to partnership approaches raises concerns that the interests of local community groups may be incompatible with, or overwhelmed by, those of larger partners such as asset-focused housing associations.

This is not inevitable and the role of partners and intermediaries has clearly been important; however, a key challenge in scaling up community-led initiatives is that professionalisation may threaten the very objectives and values that small-scale local providers were created to preserve. At a national level both sectors place a strong emphasis on their members being community-led and maintain a commitment to peer mentoring. It will be interesting to observe, as these two sectors evolve, whether similar or different solutions emerge to the common dilemma of harnessing external resources and support, while maintaining the local scale and accountability that provides the unique added value of the community-led housing sector.

**Scaling up or going viral?
How should community-led housing be supported?**

Full report:

➔ <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/vsr/2013/00000004/00000003/art00007>

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What lessons can the co-operative and mutual sector offer for the housing association sector?

What do the proposals for 'flexible' social housing tenancies mean for the future of social housing provision?

Should social housing be simply a welfare-safety net for the most vulnerable groups? What effects does this have on social-spatial polarisation?

Explore all these questions and more at the ESRC seminar on The Big Society, Localism and Housing Policy, St Andrews, 13-14 March 2014

➔ <http://bigsocietymlocalismhousing.co.uk/>

Questions of cause and effect

Research by the Director of York University's Centre for Housing Policy Rebecca Tunstall explores that elusive idea, the Big Society.

She points out that in May 2010, just days after the general election, the Coalition announced they had 14 "already agreed policies" to promote their Big Society idea.

There was lots of discussion of what the term might mean. Many commentators suggested that people on low incomes or from deprived areas may have less inclination or less capacity to take up opportunities to participate. Some argued that the most significant element of Big Society may be to reduce state activity. For example, in 2010, Ed Miliband was quoted in The Guardian saying the Coalition was: "cynically attempting to dignify its cuts agenda, by dressing up the withdrawal of support with the language of reinvigorating civic society".

Rebecca's research considered the effects of Coalition pledges in low income areas. It found little evidence of a skew in impact that would disadvantage these areas. She noted there was little overall impact assessment so far, however. On a second issue, the welfare mix in poor areas, the research found that there has been a slightly reduced role for the state, and an increase for the private sector, third sector and families. But more important is the 'overall scale of welfare activity' coupled with 'reductions in activity towards low income areas'.

Read more at

➔ <http://bigsocietymlocalismhousing.co.uk/seminar-2>

Renovating empty homes: a community good

In 2011 a bold policy decision was made to allocate a significant slice of the Empty Homes Programme to non-registered housing providers. David Mullins and Halima Sacranie from the Housing and Communities Research Group at the University of Birmingham explain

While conceived primarily as a way of tackling empty property, the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP) can now be regarded as one of several community-led funding programmes loosely associated with the Localism Act. Its impact should therefore be assessed not just in relation to value for money of empty homes brought into use but also the wider impact of allocating funding to community-led groups.

Our new research explores the early impacts of the £5.3 million from the national total of just under £50 million allocated to 19 community-led organisations in the Midlands. The report provides a programme analysis, six case studies and identifies the five essentials of self-help housing (properties, finance, workforce, residents and partners), social impacts and community benefits claimed by the projects, growth and sustainability of the sector and makes six interim recommendations.

The majority of grant recipients (16) were locally based and planning to operate in a single local authority area, with six of these organisations concentrated in Birmingham City; five of them were successful in both rounds of funding for 2012/15. Projects generally formed new streams of work within existing community based and social purpose organisations working with young people, NEETS, homeless people, BME groups and ex-offenders. A mix of charities, limited companies, social enterprises, community interest companies and industrial and provident societies secured funding; nearly half were faith-based organisations.

Six case studies from across the Midlands, from

Shropshire to Lincolnshire with urban cases in Birmingham (2), Coventry and Nottingham, provide a picture of motivations. While for most organisations renovating empty homes was a new departure, it was usually seen as closely linked to existing organisational aims. EHCGP was summed up by one participant as 'an income stream, but with a social purpose'.

Local knowledge was an important advantage for community-led projects in securing suitable properties;

local authorities were also helpful, but there were often difficult negotiations. In some cases landlord expectations made it *'impossible to manage properties at an affordable rent once the renovation had been completed'*.

Two main business models were adopted. The lease and refurbish model uses EHCGP funding towards the refurbishment cost while housing benefit and rent are used to cover leasing costs. The acquire and renovate model uses EHCGP to buy properties with private borrowing or reserves making up the balance of refurbishment and purchase costs. This model proved increasingly popular with the growth of an asset base seen as a significant advantage. One interviewee advised: *'If at all possible find a way to own the properties'*.

Partnerships were key: *"We realised as an organisation we can't do this on our own, so it's finding the right partnership in order that we can fulfil that global objective."*

Case study organisations claimed a variety of social impacts and community benefits, including move-on accommodation for supported housing projects and as *"a way of targeting needs groups ..unlikely to be assisted through homelessness or social housing routes"*. Other benefits related to employability skills and workforce satisfaction: *"I feel the satisfaction of being able to look at the house and be like, "Yeah, I've done this."*

Most case studies provided apprenticeship, volunteering and training opportunities and work for small local contractors, retaining more of the money in the local economy than large scale procurement programmes. Environmental benefits were claimed through recycling existing housing rather than demolishing and building new: *"There's something special about renovating a house because in this current climate, it's about recycling and preserving and natural resources."* It is intended to validate these claims in a social audit of the 2012/15 programme.

Early impacts on sector growth and organisational sustainability were evident, with known Midlands self-help housing organisations increasing from one to 22. Early evidence of sustainability was the success of five Midlands projects in Round 2 EHCGP bids.

Evaluation of Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP) – Midlands Regions Baseline Report. Contact d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk

Real localism for co-operative housing

A recent project used the international experience of co-operative housing to inform the UK community-led housing sector and explore its interaction with localism. It was undertaken by Dr Richard Lang, the first winner of the prestigious William Plowden Fellowship in Good Governance, and supervised by Professor David Mullins.

Richard has a well-grounded understanding of the well-established Austrian co-operative housing sector, while David has expertise in housing and communities and a network of links with self-help, community-led and co-operative housing in England. The project explored the potential that co-operative governance offers for effective localism and sustainable community building.

The project followed William Plowden's insistence on understanding real impacts of major policy change on people, especially in relation to governance and social innovation. This approach is particularly apposite to current policies purporting to promote 'localism' and its bedfellow, 'the big society'. These policies are often seen as merely rhetorical, but if implemented for real could have profound impacts on people; not least through impacts of community participation on social cohesion and good governance.

Our focus on the conditions for 'real localism' to flourish involved engaging with the wider international experience of co-operative governance. Drawing on the Vienna model of public promotion and institutional support highlighted the importance of the wider governance context in stimulating a strong co-operative housing sector but potentially endangering bottom-up resident action. This finding is of considerable importance to the notion of 'scaling up' the community led sector so that it has a greater impact on key housing agendas such as housing supply, affordability and sustained neighbourhood regeneration. While public promotion could provide a means of access to resources and technical support to scale-up, it could simply produce a professionalised sector distanced from communities and thereby negate some of the key advantages of user and citizen participation in community-led housing.

While the English co-housing and community land trust sectors have sprung out of different social movements, not

always linked to the cooperative housing tradition, they clearly exhibit co-operative principles in their governance. Depth interviews with leading actors in the community-led and co-operative housing sectors highlight some of these common historical and values based links, and potential for promoting real localism. The gradual emergence of a broad 'mutual housing sector' with a loose umbrella alliance, the Mutual Housing Group, has enhanced the ability to promote practical opportunities for co-operative approaches and to influence the political agenda.

However, the sector's engagement with the Coalition government's localism policies has been sceptical and contested. *"Localism, that's politics, isn't it? ... The shaping of the political end, I'm not really interested in that. In terms of the practicalities on the ground ... our approach is to try to see if we can develop more housing in various different ways."* Nevertheless the sector has proved adept at (re) defining the scope of localism and challenging less helpful policies that have accompanied it. Although the recent political discourse on localism has given the sector a better profile in the wider public, programme funding for community-led housing has actually been relatively small scale and short term and will not in itself define the nature of the sector.

The study has provided us with a better understanding of the structure of the community-led sector, and the importance of support mechanisms to achieving real localism. The study outlines basic models in each sub-sector and identifies a key difference in relation to 'participation principles' with community-led groups tending towards "extended self-help" meaning not (only) by actual users but by a local community including both residents and participants (see Figure 2).

The study has laid down a number of challenges for further research that will be important for future work in the Housing and Communities Research Group on self-help housing, co-operative housing models and wider housing governance. Key dilemmas concern growth and promotional models, the extent to which these should involve wider partnerships with public bodies and larger housing organisations (see Figure 3), the potential for and risks of institutionalised public promotion.

We have been successful in an application to the Austrian Academy of Science to develop work from this fellowship into a full comparative project. This will investigate how different governance models of co-operative housing influence the creation of social capital in local

communities and how this might be enhanced through vertical 'linking capital'. This study will include case studies of community-led housing in the English Midlands and co-operative housing in Vienna and will take place between 2014 and 2016. It will benefit enormously from our engagement with key parts of the community-led and co-operative housing sectors in England during the Plowden Fellowship, including a presentation at Coin Street, London, in September 2013 convened by the

William Plowden Committee in liaison with the Mutual Housing Group and Third Sector Research Centre. Bringing real localism into practice through co-operative housing governance. The role and prospects of community-led housing in England

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Figure 2: Extended (community) self-help models

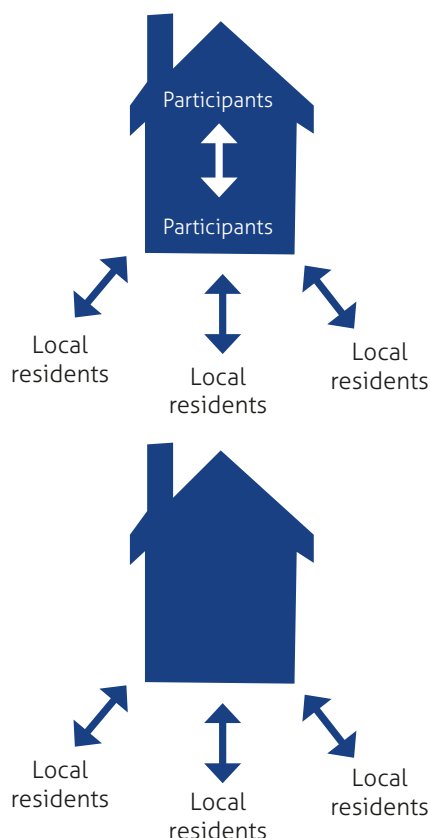
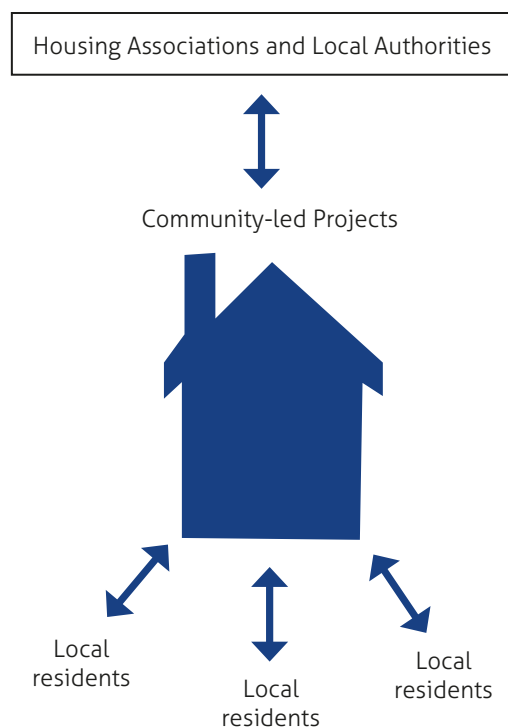


Figure 3: Community-led Governance Models with External Enablers



Collective custom build: field your dreams

How to get projects off the ground

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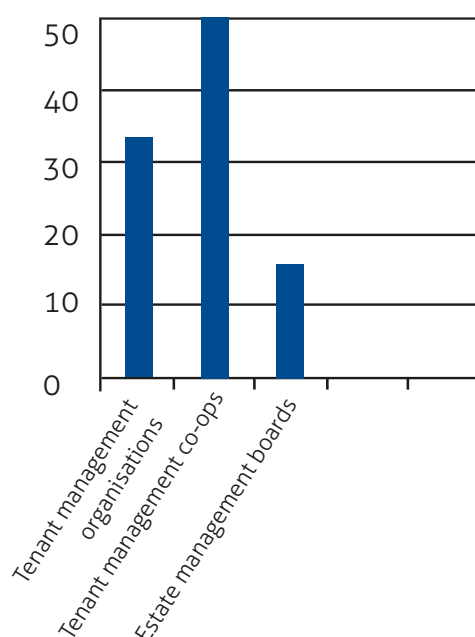


The University
Of Sheffield.



In numbers: mutual housing

Mutuals own or manage some 190,000 homes. Organisations managed by tenants in the social sector account for more than a quarter of mutuals. Of these:



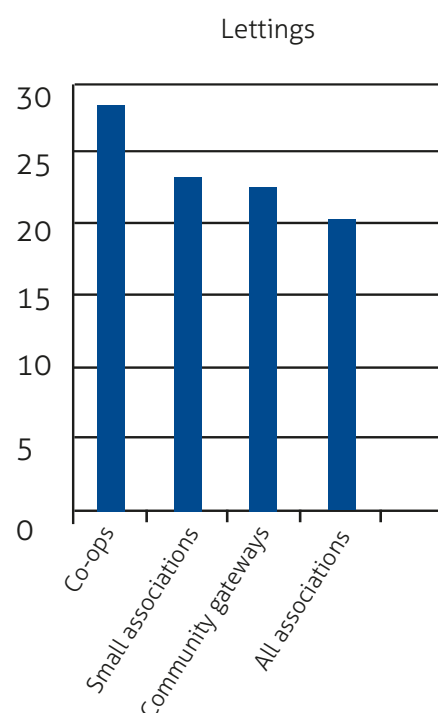
Of the rest, more recent additions such as community gateways and mutual housing associations account for two fifths of all mutual and co-op housing.

Mutual performance

Research from the Human City Institute attempts to quantify the benefits of mutual housing over conventional social models. The findings include:

- Housing management: co-ops take 34.4 days on average to let a home compared with 80.2 days for small housing associations.
- Non-decent housing: 4% compared with 10% for small associations.

The former Tenant Services Authority found co-ops outsourced all other landlord types on customer service, repairs and maintenance, dealing with complaints, looking after communal areas, helping with housing benefit, health and safety and neighbourhood safety.



From More than markets: mutual and co-operative housing in the UK, Human City Institute.

Free download:

➔ <http://www.humancity.org.uk/publicationsRef20.htm>

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COMING SOON

Our next issue in February will be on regeneration.

Send us your research news and events on these topics.