Previous events

Seminar Series 5 (2017-2018)

Seminar 4: March 15ᵗʰ 2018: Understanding and reconfiguring networks of design decision-making [international examples of collaborative housing]

Dr Jasmine Palmer, University of South Australia, School of Art, Architecture and Design

Our Spring term Housing and Communities Network programme got off to a great start with the visit of Dr Jasmine Palmer from the University of South Australia School of Art, Architecture and Design. Jasmine posed two important questions: **'why do we have the housing, architecture and cities that we do?'** and **'how can we get to the housing, architecture and cities that we want?**

Her answers to these questions, which also underpin current enthusiasm for 'community-led housing' in this country, took us on a fascinating journey 'following the actors' involved in disrupting conventional approaches to developing and managing multi-unit apartment complexes in Australia.

While most Australian housing still follows the 'Australian dream' of low-density single plot homes with high levels of individual control (approximating to custom build in this country), many Australians are now looking for higher density urban living. However, they find that what's on offer from the real estate industry falls far short of their expectations in terms of their ability to influence design and build communities.

Jasmine's research journey shows us that it is currently almost impossible for individuals and communities to initiate design and construction of apartment complexes. To achieve this would require major systemic changes to the ways in which actors relate to each other in housing production, management, consumption and exchange. Yet a small number of projects seem to have managed to achieve this change! By studying successes and failures and following the actors involved Jasmine provides some learning points with potential to transfer to our own context where community-led housing models are struggling to gain a foothold in a system dominated by market exchange and to a lesser extent by large scale top-down state and non-profit housing models.

Jasmine maps existing and alternative housing systems by combining Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Social Network Analysis (SNA). Her complex system maps include more than 40 actors and decision makers involved in existing multi-unit apartment complexes. She finds, unsurprisingly, that 'market value and development profit are the primary drivers' and, worryingly, that there are 'limited opportunities for occupants to engage in or directly influence the housing production process'.

Turning to maps of a small number of alternative models in Melbourne that seek to enable greater user and community influence she finds that the actor-networks are radically different. Her innovative case studies involve small apartment complexes of 4-25 dwellings with greater opportunities for resident influence. All involve some redefinitions in actor roles between developers, funders, design team and residents.

Motives and structural position are key drivers that enable different outcomes to be achieved. Manoeuvring and re-orientation of actors is possible to enable collectives of residents to enjoy greater influence but there are also important barriers that can limit success. At the project level, these include access to land and finance. Another factor, media influence, emerges in one successful case, which despite a relatively small-scale pilot had achieved wide recognition and a future customer base. One of the failed cases highlights the limits to international learning transfer. In Berlin, a key success driver has been the emergence of architect/project manager actors who access land and finance and organise residents into collectives. However, in Melbourne one similar diversification simply added to the crowding of the actor-network between developers and residents.

This seminar brought together a diverse group with experience of private and non-profit housing in the West Midlands. The need to find solutions that give greater influence to communities and individuals was found to underpin many of the issues faced in the region; from involving young people in construction in Walsall to enabling housing options for local residents in Worcester and

meeting community health needs in Herefordshire. As one of the participants noted a key value of Jasmine's approach is the ability to differentiate models of community-led housing in a more precise way than labels such as 'community land trusts' and 'co-housing' allow. Mapping actors and their ability to influence housing outcomes is clearly an important root in to building hope for housing.

Jasmine's research also draws on international experience including baugruppen in Berlin and UK collective self-build. She is currently on secondment to the Technical University of Delft in the Netherlands and will be returning to Birmingham in July to contribute to the workshop on international research at our conference on **Hope for Housing – the rebirth of Community-Led Housing on July 9th.** The Actor-Network mapping approach will provide a valuable addition to the toolkit of concepts from international research that we are hoping the workshop will bring to the conference to support community-led housing in the West Midlands.

View her power point presentation [Understanding and reconfiguring networks of design decision-making (PDF)](#)

You can find out more about Jasmine's research from her webpage and the following paper on

which her Birmingham presentation was based.

https://issuu.com/jasminepalmer/docs/consolidating_the_australian_dream_

https://jasminepalmer5.wixsite.com/amuhp

David Mullins March 17 2018