

## Housing for Community: Re-imagining co-housing in the age of Neo-liberalism

P4 Reflection Essay

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### Aspect 1: The relationship between Research and Design

The Global housing studio had a clear structure and transition between the research phase and design. For me the transition was smooth. A clearly articulated problem statement and hypothesis at P2 phase led me directly to a design brief through which a concept could begin to develop. The research component which was structured to inform the design phase was highly effective, however my approach to the housing design itself as an effective tool for **'Design as Research'** is debatable.

### Aspect 2: The Relationship between the graduation (project) topic, the studio topic, your master track, and your master program.

I consider the topic of the studio highly relevant for today's practice and for architectural education. My project engaged the challenges of affordable housing by attempting to understand the affordable housing dilemma on a more universal scale. As a student from New Zealand I was not interested in specific Indian issues, rather, I was interested in the similarities and differences between low cost housing globally. Through the research phase, including the trip to India, these curiosities were satiated to some degree.

In terms of the relationship of my graduation project to the theme of the studio, I felt my project filled some requirements but also deviated from some aspects which seem to me to have become a hallmark of the Global housing studio in general. The issue of repeatability, a **'rubber stamp'** mentality or the **'kit-set of parts'** approach to affordable housing seems to be encouraged, despite the fact that the most well-designed of these (example of the elemental **'Half-house'**), often do not proliferate as intended. My project chose to address the issue of mass housing from a different angle, specifically: a repeatable programmatic and managerial strategy which could be scalable based on specific spatial and social contexts.

For me, although the transition from the initial design phase to design was smooth, I have some reservations regarding the topic. Due to the **broad 'Meta' nature of the research question, I felt that in some cases the scope of my question was too wide.** Therefore, as I approach the P4 presentation, an objective reflection on the current state of my design concept in relation to the original research question essay would elucidate a few discrepancies. Such as the applicability of the housing model when considering contrasting concepts regarding ownership. It could be said that in my desire to understand the crux of the problem, my research question became too political. However, it could also be said that any mass housing scheme is inherently political and to ignore politics is to enter the realm of fantasy.

In terms of my master program, this studio has slotted in perfectly with my intentions for the degree. I have a background in residential housing design and I always intended to broaden my knowledge in housing as a major part of my architectural education. I took MSc1 Dutch housing, the Why Factory: **Future Worlds (Big mistake...)** and now housing design in a different climate and a more extreme reality. Linking New Zealand with the Netherlands and now India has been very.

**Aspect 3: Elaboration on research method and approach in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.**

The initial method of research was through a type of ethnography, or an ethnographic lens. This included multiple site visits, and sketch-based photo analysis. This along-side a more quantitative 'information gathering' approach provided a strong foundation for the second semester. The method of research beyond site analysis was through the design of an alternative management/financing scheme and a building design. My intention was to leverage a comprehensive understand of the theory of neoliberal housing crisis, and of existing solutions (FUCVAM model) to develop a new model of co-housing adapted to the Indian context. Typically, most, if not all, housing co-operatives are either retrofits too, or designs based on, established unit-based housing apartments. I wanted to explore the possibility of a different kind of architecture which is generated from theory focused on how the residents would design, build and live – not how a third party wants to invest. The challenge then is: how can a scheme develop through this thinking without becoming utopian? i.e. how to satisfy the limitations of housing in Nalasopara?

I believe the design that developed is somewhat successful at achieving these goals. The single co-housing unit (diagram shown below), designed as a replacement to, and on the footprint of, 3 rows of Baithi Chawls is organized to meet all the requirements of a high-density, medium-rise apartment building in Nalasopara. The design also achieves the principals outlined by the Latin American FUCVAM model. Where the project had some issues was the in the schemes repetition. The intension was always that the existing residents should work directly with the architects at the design phase, therefore, the issue for me was following this thought process multiple times with the intention to generate different outcomes. This proved to be more difficult than expected. Unfortunately, I think the only way to test this scheme properly would be to actually have multiple designers working on separate projects.



**Aspect 4: Elaboration on the relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.**

Transferability is a key characteristic of the research project. The design was approached from before the P2 phase, as an example of inner-city high-density low-cost housing manifested through an alternative chemistry. By redefining the key actors, and by empowering those who are most affected by the quality of the project, I believe far better building designs can be generated across a variety of contexts and scales. The developer cares first and foremost about his bottom line and the politician cares more about power and influence, so by putting the interests of the residents (and of a well-meaning architect) above these, the central concern becomes quality of living, and no longer profit or influence. The intent was never to create a replicable building, but rather a theory which is targeted not at how people invest, but rather how people live. I believe this graduation project engages directly with the broader issue of affordable housing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Aspect 5: Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in doing the research, elaborating the design and potential applications of the results in practice.**

The arrogance of foreign professionals to think they can come in to an underprivileged part of the world, raise their high-brow and wave their egotistical wand in attempt to solve crises is a real issue. PK Das (Mumbai architect) even spoke of the issue in a lecture given during the studio, he alluded to the fact that often NGO organizations do more harm than good in Mumbai, and the same goes for architects. For this reason, I was nervous about engaging with specific issues in Mumbai, rather seeking the aspects of the housing crisis which were common with New Zealand – a context which could better ground my project.

I believe that there are many potential applications for architectural practice that could be derived from the results of this thesis. The key theme being that better outcomes are generated when people are involved in the design whom have a vested interest in the quality of life of the residents, i.e. the residents. I am aware the project is unlikely to have a life beyond TU Delft in India, but my intension for taking this graduation studio was to generate a methodology which could improve housing design in any context, and on any scale. In that regard, the project conclusions could have a life beyond this thesis.