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Professionalizing co-housing: Passionate expertise in France, UK, US and the Netherlands

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Abstract
As an alternative to traditional housing development that has self-management, co-design and resident participation at its core, initiating cohousing groups often struggle to be recognised by traditional housing institutions. They can also lack the social, technical and financial expertise required to articulate needs or bring projects to fruition. When mainstream development partners (e.g., architects and housing associations) are involved, they too may misunderstand fundamental risks and issues related to self-managed housing groups. These knowledge gaps are addressed by either hiring external development consultants, programme managers and financial and legal advisers, or involving novel professions catering to cohousing particularities such as group-facilitators, process-management and legal coop-specialists. The expertise of these 'professional activists' is often (initially) based on personal experience living or developing their own group, rather than formal training.

This paper will draw on interviews carried out with cohousing professionals and advisers in the Netherlands, France, the UK and US to: (a) look at the specific needs and emerging offer of professionals, training and networks in each country and (b) identify major dilemma's and risks connected to different fields of expertise and to the process of 'becoming' professional, including: credibility and objectivity, exploitation and power dynamics, and commercialisation and monopolisation. We conclude with a discussion about how the move to 'professionalise co-housing' is connected to key questions and debates around 'the need to' mainstream and institutionalise this alternative sector according to particular logics. We ask what successful professionalization looks like and describe new paradigms for collaboration in housing provision and management.

Keywords: co-housing; professionals; consultants; mainstreaming; institutionalisation

1. Introduction

Co-housing is an umbrella term for communal housing initiatives that create alternative solutions to traditional housing development, with self-management, co-design and resident participation as core-values permeating the planning, construction and development of group schemes.

While cohousing initiatives in Europe have been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century [Krokfors 2012; Wohnbund 2015] and have even longer histories in specific countries, initiating cohousing groups still struggle to be recognised by established housing institutions. Traditional development partners (e.g., architects and housing

associations) who become engaged in the process may misunderstand fundamental values, risks and issues related to self-managed housing. But groups too can lack the social, technical and financial expertise required to articulate needs, obtain planning permission and bring projects to fruition within an otherwise mainstream setting.

These knowledge gaps are addressed in a number of ways by would-be co-housers. A common one is to hire external technical consultants like traditional project managers and financial and legal advisers. These 'experts' or 'professionals', may however be insufficiently equipped to deal with the development particularities of cohousing which require the ability to move between and translate knowledge(s) of different kinds. The other, often complementary method is to draw on an emerging cadre of co-housing specialists (e.g., group-facilitators, process-management and legal coop-specialists) who have developed their own co-housing projects and use this experience, rather than formal training, to advise other groups. This is a unique position between activist and expert, stakeholder and professional, which carries its own tensions.

Set against the backdrop of co-housing's increasing popularity and growing relevance as a sustainable living alternative across Europe, this article explores the aforementioned dynamics and the types and roles of professional co-housing actors that are working in the UK, the Netherlands, France and the US. It draws on qualitative interviews and fieldwork carried out by the authors between 2015-16[1]. Informed by sociological literature on professionalisation and recent geographical scholarship that 'humanises' the professional as well as planning theory we discuss cohousing's professionalization as a paradox that sits at the blurry threshold of mainstream and alternative housing worlds. Our analytic framework highlights, questions of legitimacy, gate-keeping, knowledge and control while our comparative approach recognises that while housing practices and attitudes particularly around homeownership and governance can share similar features across Western contexts, specific national histories and political contexts influence the local manifestation of practices and typologies—including their 'professional' elements.

The paper moves in four parts: the next section sets out our framework building on relevant literature; the third provides a background of each country's co-housing development in the context of mainstream housing systems, identifying the specific characteristics, motivations and emerging role of professionals. The fourth identifies the major comparative issues and risks connected to different fields of expertise and to the process of 'becoming' professional, including: credibility and objectivity, exploitation and power and commercialisation. It reflects on the apparent contradiction between the bottom-up, democratising ethos of individual co-housing initiatives, and the institutionalisation of expert knowledge and professional practices. This, we argue, is a fundamental paradox that all co-housing professionals and consultants – and the collaborative paradigms which they operate within- must contend with. The conclusions then return to how co-housing professionals in all countries and occupational typologies must actively negotiate between a personal passion and commitment to co-housing and an objective distancing from its mechanics. We offer a critical reflection on what this raises for policy and practice in the sector, as well as academic scholarship and discussions.

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[1] We are an interdisciplinary team with long-term engagement in cohousing through the lenses of sociology, critical human geography, economy, planning and engineering. We combine qualitative research methods with contextual knowledge about urban housing and planning systems, and building professions. The authors visited sites and interviewed a few of the Netherlands participants together, while all UK and US interviews were carried out by Fernández Arrigoitia and all French material was gathered by Tummers as part of a longer term investigation.

2. Professionalisation of co-housing as paradox

Groups call upon a whole range of experts and advisers during different stages of development, including:

- financial advise (for revenue capital, forecasting expenditure and costs);
- legal guidance (for property, tax, contracting and governance);
- built environment experts (architects, landscape people, raft of survey materials);
- housing enablers (policy, regeneration, health and social care); and
- construction experts (structural, civil or landscape engineering; planners).

Our study found however that there are very few specialists that identify solely as cohousing experts. The mechanisms and structures of cohousing, as a niche market, sit both within and outside the mainstream. The landscape of professions is therefore diverse, and ranges from more traditional occupation to emerging and alternative ones. As one respondent explained,

> "...for those groups that are forming, there needs to be a challenging perspective. They're risk takers and they want to create something that challenges the mainstream for different reasons- whether socially, ecologically- they recognize the gap. So at its very nature, they're not looking at a standardised product. So to what extent this can be pushed. There's potentially huge appetite [for it] but the other countries in your study have a high degree of standardisation in professional services that doesn't appeal to groups here yet."

We consider professionalisation in relation to sociological discussions on the emergence of occupations as an ideological construct, which is described as,

> '...a process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group in order to maintain practitioners own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction...seeking status and recognition for the importance of the work often by standardization of the education, training and qualification for practice' (Evetts 2011: 6-7).

This concern for legitimacy, or 'status' through standardisation is not surprising in the context of groups seeking to justify their labour as a formal occupation, along with the resources and institutional support needed to support it. But encouraging 'professionalism' in co-housing through the setting of boundaries of knowledge and expertise does present a paradox2. A strict setting of parameters of knowledge and practice is in many ways antithetical to the ethos of cohousing as a DIY system of bottom-up, non-hierarchical self-management that values resident 'non-expert' knowledge. What is unique and ultimately paradoxical to the context of co-housing is the way professional 'knowledge' becomes embedded and legitimated within this niche 'non-conformist' sector that prides itself in resident and lay knowledge.

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[2] We utilise the word paradox here to highlight a condition of apparent opposites, rather than a problem requiring normative solutions. Our contention is that if co-housing is to remain a force that works within but against the traditional mainstream way of producing homes, then the inevitable tensions inherent to the paradox must be recognised and negotiated as a productive reality.

3. Professional (co-)housing as practise

3.1 Professional context

Hughes and Huges (2013) emphasize the individual, subjective nature of professionalism and point to the relevance of codes of conduct, issued by professional institutions. For professionals specialized in co-housing, such institutes do not yet exist- although in France they are emerging as we will see. The question arises however in how far co-housing constitutes a new field of expertise: surely the structural engineers can construct safe premises, also when the client is a group of households united in a coop or other? First we need to establish what is different about the type of professionals that is needed for co-housing, and apparently not available in mainstream. From the interviews we derive that both additional skills and different knowledge are needed- but in most cases it concerns a change of attitude and the manner of applying professional knowledge. Working with co-housing as a collective client involves for example understanding group dynamics and decision-making, but those are also useful faculties when operating in a co-creation team. So far the most outspokenly new emerging type of professionals seems to be the 'building coach' for co-housing initiatives, tantamount to a 'project manager' for larger building projects with so-called professional or public clients. Social facilitators, described before, are also growing. Following the southern German examples of Tübingen and Freiburg, DIY-housing has even become the basis for urban expansion, notably in new-town Almere [Bresson and Tummers, 2014]. On the other hand, public authorities stimulating local initiatives may be accused of distorting market conditions. Lloyd et all [2015] point at the embracing of 'self-build' by the neo-liberal UK government. At the same time, cities like Berlin for example are struggling to ensure that access to 'DIY' housing is truly accessible, and not only possible for the well-educated, affluent and able-bodied [Droste 2015]. Many of the UK respondents also noted that there is a need for the cohousing professional landscape to connect more strategically with leaders in local authorities because a champion within an enabling council can bring in crucial capital revenue grant funding or help with planning conditions.

Moreover, established professions such as engineering, urban planning and architecture are subject to strict codes of conduct and regulations generated through 'professional' associations—a kind of circular self-sustaining system that, in the planning of cohousing as an alternative form of production could be limiting and counter-productive. For this paper especially relevant is the planning system co-housing projects develop in, characterised by Servillo & van den Broecke (2012:43) as.

> '*the capacity of a system of rules, competences and practices to steer spatial dynamics.*'

The authors see,

> '*The processes of institutional change connected to a planning system (…) as complex, path-dependent and path shaping reflexive–recursive dialectic of actors in relevant social groups, and planning systems in institutional frames, guided by multiple social rationalities rather than a technical one.*' (2012:56)

It is therefor necessary to contextualise the state of co-housing professionalization per country.

3.2 Housing context

In all of the countries in this study, but especially in the US, mainstream housing since the late 1940s onwards has favoured private homeownership as an ideology supported

by a raft of policies and practices. The post-war public housing programmes in Europe were steered by the large deficit caused by the war. As consequence, they were strongly oriented on volume-production, industrialization and standardization. With growing affluence and diversification of households, the demands for quality and diversity in housing have also increased. Since the 1980's, gentrification of inner city neighbourhoods is further causing segregation and suburbanization. The distance between affordable housing conditions for low-income, and high-end accommodation however differs in each of the countries, whith US at its lead.

While public housing first was designed with the notions of solidarity, sharing and community and destined towards the working classes, this was later reconfigured as housing for the neediest, with the particular American condition of racial segregation marking its soico-spatial contours (Burd-Sharps and Rasch 2015). The reduction of social housing opportunities for those who need them the most through disinvestment and demolition have led to crises of supply and affordability (see: Wyly & Hammel 1999; Vale 2000; Goetz 2003; Hackworth 2007; Patillo 2009). Stark racial divides also continue to be evident in the homeownership market, where minority neighbourhoods have traditionally lagged behind in terms of economic value—a pattern that has remained after the housing bubble exploded.

Planning in France is highly centralized, but large regional differences have lead to relative autonomy and local authorities have an important say in housing. The housing market varies strongly from shrinking to booming regions, which partly explains the different concentrations of co-housing initaitves. Public housing (HLM) is a relatively low share and private charities play an important role in providing accomodation (for example *Fondation de France*). By contrast, in the Netherlands, Housing Corporations formed a buffer of high-quality affordable housing, which has been declining since the privatisation policies initiated during the 1990s. Twentieth century housing was developer-led and architect-designed, responding very reluctantly to new requirements such changing demography and sustainability. As a consequence, since the 1980s civil initiatives for customized collective (CW) and environmental projects have emerged [Qu and Hasselaar, 2011]. Until recently, the Netherlands had the lowest percentage of self-development in Europe [RIGO 2005]. A national policy since 2000 aims to change this to a minimum of 30% share of self-build development. However despite installing a number of planning instruments, such as handbooks and subsidies, and new agencies to mediate between self-builders and institutional partners, the percentage of 'self-build' housing remains below 15% of yearly new production [Platform31, 2012]. An evaluation by the Ministry of Economics pointed to the planning system as inhibitory factor. The 2000 policy is mostly based on individual self-build plot, but increasingly collective housing strategies are re-emerging, developed by local authorities, in partnership between housing institutes and residents groups, or as autonomous eco-initiative [Tummers, 2015]. The experts interviewed for this research represent those different generations of co-housing.

This history and context has impacts on the way cohousing, against a predominantly homeownership tenure ideology and policies, has evolved.

3.3 Interviewee profiles
It is important to recognise the personal trajectories of cohousing professionals in each country as this provides insight into the national trends that have supported or blocked

their development. Moreover, their varied motivations, interests and aspirations must be better understood and supported when developing a future cadre of professionals.

The four American interviewees had consulting roles that ranged from architects, developers, and project managers to group facilitators and marketing advisers- some combined more than one of those roles. Two cohousing pioneers interviewed for this project had lived in Denmark where they had been inspired by the cohousing model and decided to translate it into a US context. Some had strong environmental and ecologically oriented backgrounds that led them to work with cohousing in the first place. Having learnt facilitation skills in running and developing their own community, they can help others with these jobs. One consultant, for example, uses her +25 years of experience living in cohousing, as well as multiple professional engagements with the sector, to advice groups on all aspects. She often plays an important role in talking directly to banks, setting up investment structures, helping to get group members mortgages, advising on legal aspects and regulations – aspects, she said, groups can be rather oblivious to. Another had moved from being a volunteer community organizer, to being a paid marketing and outreach consultant (paid by a for-profit developer, to find groups and educate them), to becoming a developer and—due to both the financial crisis and personal circumstances—returning to her consultancy role.

In the Netherlands we interviewed seven professionals in four cities. Besides the practicing architects, most of their backgrounds are in social sciences, whose interest in cohousing or 'cohousing-like' developments generally stemmed from anti-authoritarian visions and alternatives to mainstream housing for traditional nuclear households. Personal engagement with group self-build was the first experience of collaborative housing development for two of the CPO project managers. Others had been involved in co-living or 'living groups' in their university and post-university lives.

While in the US and the Netherlands, most professionals were initially motivated by belief in alternatives to mainstream forms of building, living or nuclear household typologies, UK respondents were moved by broader interests and histories in the social sector, as well as issues of welfare and sustainability. This does not mean that the counter-cultural ethos is not present here, but that the kinds of individuals encountered may be more 'traditional' in their own living practices and committed to public service than in the other two countries.

Table 2: Cohousing professional/consulting typologies and titles

Title	Role/Description	NL	Fr	US	UK
Marketing consultant	Educating and informing people about co-housing opportunities; setting up short or long-term marketing programme for community.			X	
Development or procedural consultant/ 'building coach'	A type of profession (procedural consultant) who guides a group through decision-making and 'translates' the technocratic planning vocabulary. Responsibilities may include: Pro forma development • Coordinate/manage entitlement process • Manage design, pre-construction and construction phases • Liaise with government agencies • Owner's representation during construction • Complex entitlement process on highly impacted site • Coordinate with multiple State agencies • Establish design parameters, budget and financial feasibility	X	X	X	X
Social consultant/Group facilitator/ coach	Provide personal and group consultations and technical assistance; offer perspective, knowledge, advice, as well as tools, tours, trainings, and referrals.	X		X	X
Outreach volunteer (outreach education)			X	X	
Architects	Commissioned by the housing association, developer or the group itself to design homes with common areas; they sometimes also act as group and process facilitators.	X	X	X	X
Developers Investors	Can be a housing association, individual or group: negotiates with the group's wishes and realizes the residential complex;	X		X	X
CPO specialists	https://issuu.com/denieuwspeper/docs/dnp_zuid_nr15/1 (they will recommend who to the group	X			

Contractor	Carries out all aspects related to the construction/build/refurbishment;	X		X	X
Legal specialist	Advises on legal aspects or regulatory constraints	X		X	X
Unions and educational centres	Offer courses or seminars	X@	X		

4. Co-housing profiles

4.1.The United States

The first US cohousing project was built in 1991 by a pioneer couple in the style of the established Danish projects3, (Killock 2014: 42). Clustered mainly along the western and eastern coasts of the country, 162 communities have since been established in 36 states, and another 127 are forming. A key set of individuals across the country self-define as professionals or consultants that can help groups develop different aspects of their process. Those interviewed for this project worked locally with groups, but also often long distance via Skype. They get hired by groups as far as Canada to do either hour-by-hour work, a pre-set package deal over a particular period of time or a more bespoke approach to facilitation. Architects that specialise in cohousing can facilitate the participatory design process by bringing in the necessary local designers and getting groups to build the community while co-designing the physical space. Amongst others, they teach compassionate communication mechanisms to the group, and train the designers to cope with the facilitation process to avoid burnout. To them, this is not seen as training the competition, but rather as contributing to 'growing the pie'.

In the US, there is a dominant culture of 'credentialism' (Collins 1979, 1981) that extends to the cohousing realm where facilitation certificates are granted by established professionals or through Senior Cohousing Study Group workshops for things like consensus decision-making. Sage Cohousing International[4], for instance, issues a certification framework where they ensure they connect groups to certified professionals. Other professionals who cater to the cohousing sector advertise online as having certification in relevant specialist areas like: Experiential Education/Group Leadership, Non-profit Management, Fundraising, Affordable Housing Feasibility, Project Management, and other professional specialties; others are 'Certified Passive House Consultant, LEED AP and Certified Green Professionals'. One of the interviewees, who is also a cohousing pioneer, had recently begun an online training programme (called '500 homes') to teach a new cadre of professional project managers how to work with cohousing- so they can develop relationships with different developers and can help get groups to the stage where they have spent the money more effectively. A key goal is to create community of collaborative consultants because 'it's hard to be project manager out there alone'.

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[3] Developments are more typically low-rise detached houses or attached dwellings with centralised communal facilities and peripheral parking- though design trends towards condominiums and more retrofit are shifting in recent years.
[4] See: http://www.sagecohousingadvocates.org/about-us/)

4.2 The Netherlands

Cohousing professionals (architects and social facilitators in particular) grew organically alongside the development of cohousing. Many of today's self-defined cohousing experts, who continue to form part of the Dutch cohousing and senior networks, were some of the early 1970s and 80s pioneers. The eldest network: the cohousing federation (LVCW) supports cohousing projects with knowledge exchange, but no longer does consultancies. Professional firms such as BIEB and individual consultants offer expertise on group dynamic and decision-making as well as financial and legal models. For technical advise most groups rely on architects, especially firms specialised in participative design and/or sustainable building. A recent development is (former) architects acting as (co-) developers.

A consultant from a self-build consultancy firm explained that 'the pilot stage' was over and municipalities were more familiar and comfortable with the projects, treating private clients 'like corporations or real estate developers'. This suggests that some see municipal back-up as evidence of the sector's professionalisation, where becoming professional is also seen as having been reached when the government treats you in the same way as they do a corporation or real estate developer. Some professionals have worked directly with municipalities to open up planning opportunities for co-housing, for example in new town Almere or urban renewal in Rotterdam.

As co-housing is gaining interest, especially as option for senior-citizens, the amount and variety of co-housing related professionals is increasing. However there is no perceptible movement towards recognition or qualification of professionals as yet. This is very different from France, where the need to develop professional infrastructure was recognised from an early stage of the (re) emergence of co-housing and from the US, where certification is part of the discursive repertoire available to professionals and where cohousing specific training is available.

4.3 France

in France, co-housing re-emerged in the 21st century and number of projects continues to rise. Under the umbrella of 'habitat participative' (participative housing) projects take have different profiles in terms of inhabitants, legal status, building typology, etc. [Bresson & Denefle, 2015]. The recent economic crisis led to speculative rises in house and land prices, and increased job insecurity for previously un-affected middle class groups who have also been linked to a growing environmental consciousness. The number of grassroots initiatives has also increased sharply after the legal possibilities for cooperative property, abolished in 1973, were re-installed in 2003 [Denèfle 2009]; there are now numerous projects on the way, enhanced by a solid networking activities [see for example habicoop.fr].

Already in 2011 the 'whitebook on co-housing' observes:

> "Seeing the complexity of setting up a co-housing project, the inhabitants
> generally need to *surround* themselves with numerous competences. Since a few
> years, offers for professional support are multiplying and diversifying. Initiatives
> may choose to hire a 'compagnon' to mediate between politiciens, professionals
> and future residents, or they can choose to hire specific (legal, technical or

> economic) advise at specific moments during the realization process." [2011 Livre Blanc Hab Partic, p.49 (24 in pdf) authors' translation]

The co-housing networks usually lend support in the initial steps, whereas the professional project advisers specialize, according to training and backgrounds, in financial, legal or social matters. A sepecial role is taken up by regional CAUE5 in publishing handbooks such as: "Guide Pratique de l'Auto-promotion" (locatelli et al 2011] and organizing the network of municipalities promoting co-housing.

In the same year, recognising the necessity that the profession develop with proper qualifications and training, professionals have organized themselves in a network of co-housing professionals (the RAHP: ref). Many regions are considering co-housing a growing sector, the need for assistance to the building process is increasingly felt. The RAHP, headquartered in Montpellier has a 'guide for co-housing' (compagne des projets d'habitat participatif) that focuses on social engineering, real estate engineering and process mediating as the major areas of service related to specific phases in the project, from initiative to realiseation and management. Since 2012, the network also offers training to new professionals and gives certificates that are not yet formally recognised [http://www.toitsdechoix.com/activites/formation/11-activites/83-formation]. Participants can receive subsidies for the course fees, for example though (re-) empoyment programs.

Both activists and professionals in France are strongly aware of the need to network and lobby. In this sense, 'professionalization' is stronger here than for example in the Netherlands or the UK. Anticipating a rise in co-housing as a form of housing delivery, an infrastructure is being build to equip professionals and local authorities to respond to residents' needs.

4.4 The UK

The UK is at a comparatively newer stage of cohousing development from the three other countries in this study. New-build cohousing began with Springfield Cohousing in 2004 and has been developing since. Despite this growth trend, there are only nineteen built communities (versus, for example, over 600 in Germany) and around sixty-five groups in development6. Senior cohousing is becoming particularly popular (Dittmar et al 2016: 25).

As best practices get off the ground architects, project management firms and some housing association personnel are increasingly self-identifying as experts (or supporters) in the field. This growing body of technical and professional expertise contributes through community facilitation skills and their ability to advocate for the sector and develop awareness. There is now a community-led development 'scene'

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5 Consultancy for Architecture, Urbanism and Environment, a semi-public regional institute aiming to support planning initiatives from private parties as well as municipalities with information, advise and training, see for example http://www.caue67.com/

6 See: http://cohousing.org.uk/cohousing-uk and http://cohousing.org.uk/groups LILAC, inaugurated in 2014, was mentioned by all interviewees and is held as a key example of what is possible in the UK. It has paved a practical path for certain professionals who were previously disconnected from the cohousing scene as well as generating a surge of new demand in the cohousing model through good outreach and far-reaching publicity, including stories in national media. But, it was noted, without the facilities or resources with which to share what they have done or are doing, this popular interest cannot be translated into further practices.

enabling cohousing development not only through sound community facilitation skills but also by the ability of individual members to advocate for the sector and develop awareness. These individuals are likely to be working under different umbrellas such as 'development trusts', 'empty homes' 'CLTs' or 'cooperatives'. One professional interviewed in this project who self-identified as working in/with the niche area of co-housing said that while "there are enough people with overlapping interests that are getting traction [in cohousing], the grittier area of consulting is still quite new". Except one, there are no company or organisations that labels themselves specifically in cohousing development support

The architects and project management of the LILAC scheme have seen their practices reach new heights. Use that experience to continue working with other co-housing, or self-build and custom-build groups. Two issues remain: money and time. Project management consultants charge a fee that depends on the service provided. Unless they have substantial amounts of capital to invest, professional donation of time and energy is not sustainable long-term. This highlights the relative novelty of cohousing- both for groups and professionals, who are still getting used to the relatively slower pace and amount of time cohousing groups take to develop their projects.

5 Issues and positions of cohousing professionals

5.1 comparative institutionalisation

Cohousing constitutes a niche sector, is still in each of the countries looked at in this study. Success is variably dependent on aspects like strong and supportive local authorities or housing associations, helpful regulatory regimes, favourable economic and policy environments, and entrepreneurial cultures. The extent to which the cohousing sector was 'professionalised' in the sense of having many professionals formally or indirectly associated to cohousing does not seem to depend directly on the extent to the strength of the sector in each country. It also is not related to the extent to which national policies support these housing developments (by direct or implicit subsidy). In the country with the most 'professional' cohousing field in this study (the US) there is practically no support from government, whereas in the two more 'social welfare' economies of France and the UK, the relative embeddedness of professionals seemed to take place for different reasons: in France, a very supportive legal regime has catapulted the sector forward in recent years, including ample support for a professionalised environment, with training and manuals for those who want to be 'specialists'; in the UK, and the Netherlands, a climate of austerity and retrenchment of the welfare state especially after the crisis has forced many individuals to 'expand' their professional offer beyond the mainstream housing development areas they may have worked in before. Here, a variety of professional titles and descriptions are emerging embedded in or alongside – traditional housing professions, especially for architects and 'group development experts' (See Table 2). The language and practices these professionals use fit in with cohousing, while enabling them to maintain their 'mainstream' jobs—a key form of flexibility or 'third space' that is part and parcel of how this professional sector is shaping up. In understanding and moulding their practices to

this playing field, they become the 'go to' individuals or companies for cohousing developments.

A recent report on UK cohousing found that 'Cohousing could become much more widely adopted if planning, financial and institutional infrastructures enabled it. Detailed agreements must define the roles and responsibilities of residents and other stakeholders at the outset so as to avoid confusion later on' (Jarvis et al 2016). This is premised on the current state of the professional field, as well as an implicit understanding-turned-imperative that professional roles are blurry in an unhelpful way, and should be clearer.

For example a series of Dutch planning traditions that act as barriers to the effective take-up of co-housing, including:

- design and building standards;
- the dominance of large housing companies and developers;
- the fact that deep-seated notions about the nuclear family household model inform the documents and procedures of architecture and planning, including energy performance calculations, energy company requirements and zoning plans; and
- the fact that legal, policy and planning instruments are not well adapted to non-traditional practices of shared property and collective development in cohousing. (Tummers, 2011: 154)

A key difference between the US context and the European context is that American housing policies are comparatively weaker and subsidies for 'cohousing-like' developments (other than mortgage interest tax deductibility for owner-occupied housing) are virtually non-existent. Indeed, compared to the other countries in this study, the US has the strongest speculative development model, with developers leading on much of the design, development and community formation.

Professionals, again, could help fill some of those gaps. The endorsement of professional partner(s) can encourage other professionals to get involved. Housing associations are also seen as a potentially important partner but this can be complicated due to the fiscal and political environment. First, only a small numbers of associations are currently involved, and they have very different scales of operation. Like in the Netherlands, larger ones can have existing standardized processes or communication styles for dealing with traditional 'clients' that does not easily coexist to cohousing groups. While some housing associations have learned from individual journeys with cohousing, none are gearing themselves up to be cohousing enablers or development partners.

5.2 Legitimising knowledge
In all four countries, building professional credibility was raised as an important factor in the trajectory of cohousing. Many are doing this online through self-presentation, as well as through the wider support of robust national organisations or associations representing cohousing. These repositories and communicators of information serve as a virtual legitimation of professional solidity[7]. This is particularly important for

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[7] The US national cohousing association has an online portal that serves as a 'go-to' space of 'how-to' documents for would-be groups, provides a database with contact information for the distinct kinds of professionals that may be needed at one stage or another of development and allows visitors to filter according to 'finding', 'creating' or 'living in' cohousing. The web of the Fellowship for Intentional Community, a non-profit dedicated to promoting cooperative forms of living, also hosts

individuals working autonomously at the boundaries of cohousing physical and social development.

Professional accreditation and training that keeps individuals up to date and ensures they are giving the right advise are also seen as increasingly important, especially as development processes, legal and financial structures are changing quickly. But the expressed need for 'quality control' could also be framed as a kind of gate-keeping in an emerging professional sector- where the parameters of belonging to the sector are being more tightly guarded and controlled by a select few. This is important because as a form of standardisation, or setting a recognisable bar, credentials can serve as entry into the field as a competent practitioner or 'knower' and as a 'trust-building social device' that builds public faith in veracity of professional claims (Brown 2001: 28-30). The credentials (certified training or education) needed to become a cohousing-specific professional (like social facilitator) are still not as onerous as a degree(s) (like engineering or architecture) but they do follow the same logic in that it favours objective knowledge and standards as a form of expertise, it serves to shield the individual from too much scrutiny once certification is complete and it grants the power to transmit (and reserve) the knowledge to those that are authorised to give credentials and legitimate other's competence. While certification as a form of professional legitimation is part and parcel of the traditional processes of professionalisation, it can be seen as contrary to many of the working mechanisms and maxims of cohousing as a 'bottom-up' wholly democratic process, and product.

5.3 Translating knowledge

All respondents felt it was crucial to hire professionals because cohousing initiators are not familiar with the formal jargon of traditional housing development. They valued professionals' ability to 'translate' cohousing knowledge to different stakeholders with the correct discursive repertoire. One interviewee, for example, stressed the importance of using mainstream traditional housing market language to approach banks and lenders since groups sometimes believe they need to communicate their 'great' project to a bank, while a bank simply wants a safe return on their investment. She advises groups to keep their cohousing development going while using different, more 'common' terminology with the outside world, including developers. Relatedly, US respondents spoke of what they see as a crucial role for the marketing of groups, and having professional marketing assistants. Residents, they said, are typically unable to market themselves, particularly in difficult economic times. Another respondent said

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vast amounts of cohousing specific professional directories, resources and search engines. The UK Cohousing Network is actively working to support better integration of individuals with professional capabilities in the range of sector-specific projects and activities as a way of consolidating this growing housing sub-sector. New academic projects[7] and multi-stakeholder collaborations are also emerging to support and promote community-led housing across the country[7]. The Dutch Cohousing Association (LVCW) has about 60 intergenerational communities under their umbrella – the National Association Central Housing and hosts an annual open day where 60-70 communities welcome visitors. The Dutch Senior Cohousing association (LVGO) has about 150 communities organised within the National Association of Senior Communal Living. There is also a Dutch Federation of shared/intentional housing (FGW) that operates on a voluntary basis to share its experience and offer advice and supports to existing residential communities, as well as to stimulate the creation of new residential communities and new variants of communal living.

there is a real need, but rare professional understanding or capacity to bring sales, recruitment/outreach and group process together. This, she said, is where the energies must be focused since '*a real estate developer can always build the project, but they can't create the community.* In other words, the value of professionals is seen to be in their specialised and sympathetic translation of an alternative vision that not everyone in the mainstream understands. They can deliver the passion for the model to an outside audience with the correct 'professional' tone.

But groups often see professionals as an additional unnecessary cost and end up contracting for less hours or less activities to save money, at the same time that 'they'll spend endless hours discussing how hard it is to develop'. This reticence to pay externals, interviewees said, often has to do with groups' lack of entrepreneurship or business-orientated mentality. Groups may not realise that professional input can keep external fees down since only they can bring in special prices given long-term relationships with other experts and technicians which have been built over time. This discussion about the role and perception of professionals reveals some internal tensions and misunderstandings in the relationship between groups and consultants. Professionals see themselves, and not co-housers, as the ones that understand the niche cohousing business model. But the reluctance to hire or pay externals demonstrates that professional involvement is not yet a fully integrated part of the cohousing development system, and that the merits of streamlining processes and saving the group time have not been fully integrated into the sector. Groups, on the other hand, may see the time they dedicate not as 'reinventing the wheel' but as an investment in their social outcomes, or of value in and of itself.

When professionals *are* hired, selecting the right one can be problematic. Group and development facilitators can constitute a raft of people that come onto the scene with great passion and enthusiasm for cohousing but often have very little experience of enabling community-led housing or of actually understanding budgets. On the other hand, those that do grasp these practicalities (say, a professional developer) do not necessarily understand this particular niche in real estate development or how to work with groups. After an initial 'love fest' informal arrangements and lack of experience often lead to unexpected delays in outputs, loss of investment in time and finances for the architects, higher budgets for the residents and strained relationships. Even if a project gets built under these circumstances, that professional model of development is un-repeatable and knowledge is not captured for the future. For traditional architects with long experience in producing tenders for construction, including calculations, working alongside newer professionals like social facilitators can be also feel complicated. Hiring choices can therefore lead to frustration, broken professional relationships and burn out. Training (of young professionals) and education (schools teaching housing alternatives) were suggested as possibilities for countering these processes.

5.4 'Resident-expert' knowledge
Many of the interviewees saw themselves as contributing a form of everyday lived knowledge that cannot be gained through formal training. Their belief, passion and commitment to cohousing as a movement, often read through their own resident status or political alignments, is seen as an informal qualification to be valued *alongside* other types of formal or specialised training. Specifically, those respondents that lived in cohousing at the time of interview felt that residential status grants them greater credibility with the groups they advise and a capacity to help with different processes ('I understand every aspect, and believe in what they do'). They said residential status was

crucial because it kept them grounded in their professional roles as well as giving them their own space in which to be passionate about their cohousing community, which could help serve others better. This argument was not just about liberating their passion for cohousing elsewhere, but also – crucially- about the perceived objectivity of their work practice. However, one Dutch architect criticised the hiring of internal members as architects because this, she argued, can lead to an abuse of their specialist knowledge and group's trust, making the whole process lack transparency. Hiring internally was seen to overlay all kinds of complications to an already stressful process.

External professionals who are residents of other groups, on the other hand, were perceived as having the knowledge yet emotional distance to avoid irreparable group conflict, able to maintain the necessary distance and be the bad 'fall-to' person, if necessary. They can also provide useful advice about who would be best to hire under individual group circumstances. In other words, while understanding the culture, ethos and drive of cohousing was seen as a valuable asset -- a useful blurring of the lines between personal/technical expertise of cohousing process and culture—*too much* personal engagement was seen as a conflict of interest that may detract from providing a professional service, or the perceived ethical values of professionalism in this sector. Like with the question of training and certification, at stake here are the politics of belonging-- of who gets to shape, design, and develop cohousing; a question not just of practice, but with consequence for the way (and everyday logics according to which) the sector gets mainstreamed.

6 Conclusions: Towards a 'lay' professional standard?

A recent uptake of cohousing is related in part to people increasingly looking for social, economic and environmental alternatives to the traditional housing offer, at the same time that it is a response to government increasingly offering support for community-oriented schemes, and some housing associations are genuinely interested (and investing) in the possibilities cohousing may offer them. The latter, in turn, is part of a broader financial austerity regime that has promoted the 'handing over' by government of many of the social tasks previously afforded to it to non-state actors—whether private sector or civil society—via policies like Big Society and localism.

Professionalisation of cohousing expertise has therefore also been about challenging, adapting and acquiescing to the mainstream over time. This begets a fundamental paradox where a niche sector, concerned with bottom-up and democratising development processes has to sacrifice or ignore some of those principles in the quest to become more professional (as an ideological construct). This paradox seems to be commonly addressed and negotiated through recourse to the notion of 'in-between' spaces of knowledge. To be a cohousing professional means being able to successfully inhabit, travel across and coexist in different worlds of housing expertise. Individuals identifying as cohousing specialists straddle the ins-and-outs of mainstream and cohousing specific processes, which increasingly involves getting formal training and accreditation to legitimate this duality. The other form of legitimation is to have residential experience in cohousing, with this personal investment seen as a form of passion that cannot be replicated through traditional professional contexts. In the countries where cohousing was more developed, professionals were measured in their assessments of the actual success of 'cohousing' or 'cohousing professionals' in their own nation; that is, while they recognized the achievements made over time, and the interconnected nature of the ebbs and flows of their niche sector with the wider housing

market, which had at times facilitated, and in other moments hindered their movement, they all saw it as still a very niche sector in need of maturity.

Co-housing is an 'established niche' connected to and crossing over many different professional sectors. This interdependency, and the liminal space cohousing professionals inhabit between the established and alternative democratising housing systems, can be seen as an asset 'from below' to be valued and built upon.

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