

The bright side and the dark side of Participation in cohousing

HousingLIN Summit

27 February, Yael Arbell



Overview

- **CLH, cohousing and participation**
- **Participation and social connection:**
creating the community through being in community
- **Participation, inclusion and diversity:**
empowering the already empowered?
- **Conditions for effective, inclusive and equitable participation**



Community-led Housing

- Not for profit
- meets local needs
- developed and managed by members of the community
- Cooperatives, CLTs, self-help, cohousing
- Ownership models vary



Benefits of CLH

- Some need these more urgently than others
- some can access these more easily than others
- And some just get these in other ways!

A word cloud of benefits of CLH. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with the largest words at the top and smaller words at the bottom. The colors are primarily blue, teal, and yellow. The words include: Secure tenure, Sustainability, Choosing your neighbours, Empowerment, Low bills, Social connection, Tackle loneliness, Values, Agency, Not-for-Profit, Safe Space, and Tenants satisfaction.

Secure tenure
Sustainability
Choosing your neighbours
Empowerment
Low bills
Social connection
Tackle loneliness
Values
Agency
Not-for-Profit
Safe Space
Tenants satisfaction

Cohousing

- Intentional community
- Private homes, shared facilities
- 5-40 households
- High level participation (design, management)
- social connection
- predominantly private
- predominantly middle-class



Participation and social connection

- Creating the community through being in community
- Connection and belonging
- Suitable housing
- Empowerment and voice
- Tolerance and empathy



Participation and social exclusion

- Communities have conflicting values and interests
- “The usual suspects”
- Resources: skills, time, money, connections...
- Subtle forms of exclusion



Getting the balance right

Equality

Liberty

Accessibility

Affordability

Inclusion

Diversity

Equal opportunities

Participation

Autonomy

Agency

Ownership



| Empowering the empowered?

[CLH] is “an empowerment that the housing system doesn't often give you, and that's why middle class people are very drawn to it. And you know, you do end up with it being quite white and middle class because they're used to being empowered in other areas of their life and then it's only like, “well, actually, why don't have the same empowerment with housing? Ohh, hang on, I can!”

(CLH housing advisor)

Cultural capital: subtle barriers

Skills and life experiences implicitly / explicitly required for meaningful participation in cohousing

- Education and language
- Activism and volunteering
- Literacy and the digital divide (minutes, emails, phone apps...)
- Social networks

Planning for inclusion

Each community faces different challenges.
To be inclusive, CLH must develop:

- **homes** that are affordable, accessible and enable people to age in place
- **communities** that are welcoming and tolerant
- **Management structures** and processes that are inclusive, empowering and accessible



Thank you

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