

CROWDED HOUSES



Shared living spaces (such as The Collective in northwest London, pictured below) are increasingly gaining traction among generations priced out of traditional housing markets

As pressure on urban housing in the West grows, is our notion of the home changing, and what are the new options for a roof over our heads?

By Harriet Constable

For the first time in the modern era, living with parents is the most common home arrangement for 18 to 34-year-olds in the US

In urban centres across Europe and North America, human populations are growing and migration to cities is increasing. Cities, after all, are often where jobs and opportunities reside, but they are also expensive. Although not wholly confined to urban areas, according to research by the National Housing Federation, it is in cities where rising rents and surging inequality are most profoundly felt, and where home ownership is almost exclusively the remit of older, richer generations. Disharmony between affordability, accessibility and population increase form the major causes of housing crises across the West.

In the US, for example, a 2018 report by staff at Harvard University's Joint Centre for Housing

shows that 2.2 percentage points, widening the black-white gap to 29.2 percentage points. Although rates for both Hispanics and Asians have risen somewhat since 1994, the disparities with white rates are still substantial. As cities grow, minorities are often forced to live in areas of concentrated poverty with worse schools, violence a common occurrence and low social mobility, the effects of which trickle down to future generations. Hence, for many, home can become a trap.

Information on housing inequality among ethnic minorities is woefully lacking in the UK, but a 2017 Race Disparity Audit by the UK government notes that: 'Home ownership is most common among households of White British, Indian, Pakistani, and Mixed White and Asian origin; it is substantially lower among African, Arab, and Mixed White and Black African households.'

Inequality in UK housing was explored more broadly in a new report released in January 2019 by housing charity Shelter. It states that: 'If we continue as we are, only half of today's young people are likely to ever own their own home... Over the next 20 years,

of 'home', but our perspective of what it is to be an adult. Economic necessity is clearly a major factor here, but author and generational trends expert Neil Howe says millennials also have different values to the previous boomer generation. 'The traditional markers of adulthood are being reached at later ages – getting married later, buying homes later, having kids later. It speaks to the risk aversion in younger generations – they see marriage, buying a home, getting a permanent job too early as risky because they look at their parents who lost their home or marriage and they want to put those things on hold until they can make sure it works,' he says.

Both for social and economic reasons, Howe argues that the trend of young people living with their parents much further into adulthood is here to stay. 'The tentative name given to the generation after millennials is the "homeland generation" because they're home all the time,' says Howe. Advancements in technology have also made home a much more interesting place for 'homelanders' to be than it was for their parents. They can escape and adventure from the comfort of their sofa.

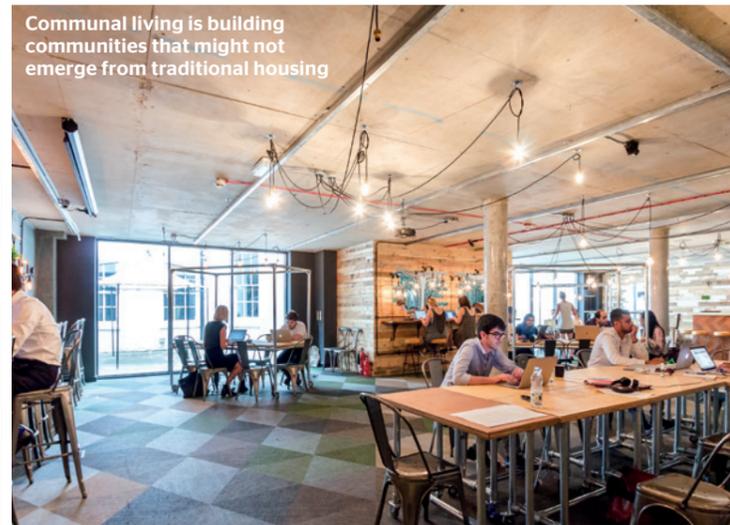
Collective, the majority of whom are young and single, cite making friends, feeling lonely in the big city and needing somewhere affordable to live as key reasons for moving here. They can cook together, take yoga classes on the rooftop or binge-watch Netflix together, before retreating to their private 12 square metre rooms to sleep. The Collective is now home to 550 people.

Writer on urban development Dr Davina Jackson believes the concept of sharing – which already forms a large part of our lives from taxi firms such as Uber to borrowing other people's dogs – will be a major trend for the future of homes. 'I have an architect friend who travels all the time, so he just rents on Airbnb. I don't see any reduction on the reliance of shared flats like this,' she says. As technology continues to make work and life possible from any corner of the globe, and because sharing is often the only viable option for young people, the notion of home ownership is slipping away in favour of the flexibility of communal homes.

But the concept of sharing isn't just for younger generations. According to the Office for National



Innovative furniture (such as this ORI Living bed that rises into the ceiling) helps to maximise smaller living spaces



Communal living is building communities that might not emerge from traditional housing



Adaptable furniture is becoming increasingly common (here, the bed retracts as the storage unit slides back)

Studies shows that expensive construction and lack of available land are major reasons why fewer homes are being built. The report states that building materials increased in price by four per cent in 2017, and the number of vacant land plots fell from 1.26 million in 2008 to just 802,000 in 2017. Huge and growing demand for homes also means that current housing stock is pricey. The report shows that today one can buy a house in only 25 of the United State's largest cities for less than 18 months of your median salary; it was achievable in 72 cities just 30 years ago.

While the ability of people to buy is shrinking, the inequality gap is widening. Home ownership is not just the remit of older generations; it is the remit of older, white generations. The report states: 'Compared with 1994, black home ownership rates have increased just 0.3 percentage points while white rates have risen

hundreds of thousands more people will be forced into homelessness by insecure tenancies and sky-high housing costs.' Across the rest of Europe the story is similar: house prices rising faster than incomes; pressure for affordable housing outstripping availability and rent prices in city centres astronomically high.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

For the first time in the modern era, living with parents is the most common home arrangement for 18 to 34-year-olds in the US, according to a study by Pew Research Centre. Lower wages, a poorer job market and high levels of debt mean that the traditional pattern of moving out of a parent's home at 18 and moving in with a friend or partner have been disrupted.

This isn't only influencing our traditional concept

When homelanders are able to leave their parent's home, 'the idea of co-living is a big trend' according to Howe. These cohorts are much more community and peer-orientated than their parent's generation, so the type of home they're looking for is also different.

Co-living opportunities, that is, renting a room in a shared building (imagine a grown-up university dorm), have sprung up across Europe and North America. The idea originated in Denmark in the 1960s, although co-living spaces only really began to emerge in major European and American cities around 2014. The reasons for their launch were twofold: in part as a solution to some of the major challenges faced by young people and a way to live affordably in the city centre, but also in response to the growing desire to build a community. One such example is The Collective, a co-living space in London. Residents living at The

Statistics, the proportion of people aged 85 and over in the UK is projected to double over the next 25 years. One solution targeted at an older generation in the UK is Older Women's Co-Housing (OWCH). This is 'an intentional community (a planned residential community designed around common values) where older people can make a final home together, where core values of mutual support and neighbourliness are adhered to,' according to Maria Brenton, who helped come up with the idea after studying similar initiatives in Holland. '[OWCH] is needed because there are so many lonely people, for women it's particularly high – 75 per cent of women over 80 are living alone,' she says. Each resident has her own private home, but the community shares common facilities such as a large vegetable garden and a dining room for weekly group meals. 'We designed the building physically to

make it easy for people to bump into one another: big windows, balconies surrounding the [shared] garden, one entrance into the building going past the common room,' says Brenton.

Potential residents must apply to live at the OWCH, and are selected by the current residents. How do they ensure all applicants are being selected fairly? 'The group has had training on non-discriminatory policies... we've tried to diversify in terms of ethnic mix, but in terms of race the group feels it's not diverse enough.' As the trend for co-housing and co-living communities grows, ensuring all applicants regardless of race, religion and gender are being provided with equal opportunities to live in these spaces is becoming a focus.

Despite its success (there's a huge waiting list for a home here), the OWCH is the only co-housing community in the UK at the moment. The main issue it has come up against is space. 'In a place such as London, a lot of available sites are snapped up by private developers for a big profit, so squeezing a site out of [the local authority] is tough,' says Brenton.

Winsun made global headlines in 2013 when it 3D printed ten houses using a special 'ink' made of cement, sand and fibre

MAKING SPACE

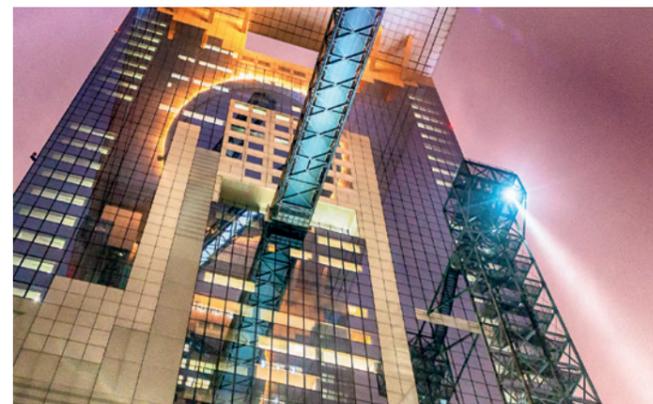
Across the West, many of our cities are already highly developed, dense spaces. Dr Jackson believes that making better use of current space will be an important part of the future of the urban home. 'There is going to have to be a major move toward smaller footprints... one of the things that is making smaller apartments interesting to live in is robotic furniture,' she says. One example of this is ORI Living, a furniture tech company that sells products such as the Studio Suite – a storage unit/TV stand/desk/bedroom extravaganza that moves around the room and adapts its functions with the push of a button.

But how we build in a tight urban space can also be improved. Roger Krulak is the CEO and founder of Fullstack Modular, a Brooklyn-based construction company that makes pre-fabricated, stackable, modular homes. 'In the next 20 years, 71 per cent of workers are going to live in the city. If you think about that, do you want a three-hour commute or to live in less space? We have to find ways to adapt to that reality,' he says.

Krulak's business stemmed out of necessity – a dearth of housing; a downward trend in construction productivity making building homes slower and ever more expensive; and diminishing levels of skilled labour. His team designs and constructs the modular houses in a factory using manufacturing processes

more often seen with much smaller items such as mass-produced clothing. Ninety per cent of the construction, right down to the paint and electrical connections, is completed before the components leave the factory. However, stepping inside a Fullstack Modular home feels the same as stepping into any other home, according to Krulak: 'The product is still a two-bed flat. The product isn't the issue, it's the process that needs to change,' he says. His hope is that manufacturing homes in this way – faster, cheaper and with the use of machines – can help solve the housing crisis.

The West could learn a thing or two here from China, where pre-fab housing is being taken to the next level. One company, Winsun, made global headlines in 2013 when it 3D printed ten houses using a special 'ink' made of cement, sand and fibre. The huge printer then creates walls layer by layer, leaving spaces for components such as electricity sockets and windows, components added in Winsun's factory. The construction of a two-story mansion takes just one day to print and two days to assemble.



The Umeda Sky Building in Japan, consisting of two connected forty-storey towers where Sekisui House's head office is located

Mind blowing as this all is, perhaps the most important aspect of Winsun's 3D printing method is that it uses up to 50 per cent of demolished waste in the ink, and produces zero waste. Not only does it vastly cut the costs and time traditionally associated with building homes, it's also good for the planet.

Another example of zero-waste construction comes from Japanese home building firm Sekisui House. At each demolition site it sorts waste into categories, takes it to its recycling centre and breaks the waste down further depending on the type of material. Some are passed on to recycling plants, others are reused in the company's own construction projects: sawdust and resin being used to make roof pieces, for instance.

CONNECTED WORLD

In our hyper-connected, globalised world, the challenges of the housing crisis are not simply confined to the cities in need. The way we develop



The Burj Khalifa in Dubai was made using sand imported from Australia

our homes can, and often does, impact ecosystems and communities thousands of kilometres away. Examples of this can be found around the globe. Dubai built its Burj Khalifa skyscraper using sand imported from Australia; the UK fits its homes with electrical wires from China and wood from Scandinavia. Our homes are pieced together using resources from every corner of the Earth. A 2018 report by the WWF showed that humanity has wiped out 60 per cent of animal populations since 1970 due to destruction of habitat. Infrastructure development, and housing in particular, is one of the major reasons for this. As we continue to develop our cities, finding more environmentally friendly construction methods will be crucial.

Architect and author Sandra Piesik believes a key solution to the challenge involves using local resources for construction, and better connecting our homes to fit with the rest of the environment. In Dubai, she suggests transforming sustainable materials which can be grown locally into building materials, such as 'dry palm leaves, which reflect the sun 15 per cent better than concrete and glass' as an alternative to using imported materials. The Dutch model is also a good example. 'They build houses from existing materials in the city. They completely change the design of a building not by what they want [it to look like] but by what is available,' says Piesik. Her view is that while we need more homes, cheaper to build and better designed, we also need to be flexible and creative with our building methods.

It's potentially a good thing that future generations appear to be community focused and willing to live in close quarters, because lack of space is a major challenge facing urban housing in Europe and the US. Migration, not only for economic reasons but also driven by conflict and climate, will lead to densely populated megacities. As living in smaller, more tightly-packed, environments becomes a reality, robust urban planning will be vital. Without it we face 'poorly planned cities, urban sprawl and associated infrastructure that create social, environmental and health challenges,' according to the World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Risks Report.

Where new homes can be built, they will need to be cheaper and more affordable than the current offering. More social housing will also be needed, according to Shelter. In the UK alone, 'we need to deliver 3.1 million more social homes over 20 year... providing both security for those in need and a step up for young families trying to get on and save for their future,' sates the report.

Perhaps most importantly, we'll need to fundamentally rethink what home is: how it is constructed, what it looks like and how it connects to everything else, from where we shop to what we eat. 'We need a different type of sustainability, that connects the built environment to nature, to forests, to ecosystems and to argiculture, a more holistic model,' says Piesik. In short, to solve the housing crisis, we need to reimagine the future of home. ●