

**COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE:  
MYTH AND REALITY**

by

Neal J. Mongold

Bachelor of Architecture  
University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, Indiana  
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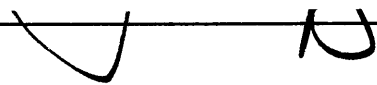
Signature of Author:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Neal J. Mongold  
Department of Architecture  
May 10, 1988

Certified by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Nabeel Hamdi  
Lecturer in Architecture  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Julian Beinart  
Chairman  
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

Rotch  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the origins and the claims of the community architecture movement. Community architecture, which has recently attracted considerable professional attention in the U.K., is a movement that argues for the importance of user involvement in the design, construction, and management of the environment. Many theoreticians see the movement as a reaction to the disastrous failures of modern architecture and planning schemes. The important lesson that community architects claim to have learned from these failures is that participation is a better process than anticipation with regard to the users and their environmental needs. Definitions of community architecture are often vaguely delimited, and can encompass other activities such as community planning, community development, community technical aid, and community landscaping.

This study presents a summary of the "new" techniques used by community architects, and then explores the nature of the claims that such practitioners have made. Using five well-publicized case studies of community architecture, the following three fundamental claims are evaluated: a) User participation leads to greater user satisfaction. b) User participation is more economical, at least in the long-term. c) User participation produces psychological and sociological benefits.

There is a lack of definitive proof as to the superiority of the community architecture method, although the experience thus far suggest that the participatory approach produces environments of equal merit as the results of a high quality nonparticipatory process. Since it seems that the objective benefits of community architecture may not, by themselves, justify the extra initial cost of the practice, the question of political implications and appeal is explored. Concern for the survival and growth of the movement has led some advocates to claim that community architecture is apolitical, but this myth is refuted here. Finally, an attempt is made to understand what elements of community architecture are applicable to the context of the United States, and what changes would be necessary for housing groups to allow for user participation in design.

Thesis Supervisor: Nabeel Hamdi  
Title: Lecturer in Architecture

## INTRODUCTION

Architecture has to do with the shaping of the physical environment around us, and thus it is also involved in the shaping of the economic, political, spiritual, and psychological environment. Because architecture is a creative process as well as a resulting product, it does not suffice to analyze only the finished product as many researchers are wont to do. The traditional architectural virtues of commodity, firmness, and delight must be present not only in what is built, but also in the way it came into existence and the way it is used. Architecture is a public art, a public good, and a public service, as opposed to pure art, which is often a mechanism intended only to communicate an artist's private intentions. For this reason, architects and architectural theorists must analyze the process of environmental design in a way that goes beyond the tradition of mere aesthetic and symbolic considerations. The process must be understood as a community process. The community architecture movement, which has recently gained considerable momentum in the United Kingdom, is exploring this view of architecture.

In the last 20 or so years, there have been many theorists who argued for greater community involvement in the creation and management of the built environment. There have also been many attempts to implement this idea. In the United States for example, in the mid to late 1960s at least eighty community design centers were opened in major cities.<sup>1</sup> In many instances the community design centers were voluntary or near-voluntary organizations, initiated and based in schools of architecture. Local chapters of the American Institute of Architects organized some centers as well. Their charter was to provide architectural and planning assistance to individuals and communities who were unable to pay for

these badly needed services.

During these same years, federally funded urban renewal projects rallied angry citizens to organize and protest against the gross political injustices, racial discrimination, and architectural and planning errors of the schemes. Community action agencies and community development corporations (CDCs) sprang up to channel dissent into positive action. Most of the community design centers had disappeared by the early 1970s due to lack of funds, lack of commitment and lack of real neighborhood support. In contrast, the more entrepreneurial community development corporations survived, and today they have a sophisticated network of support from local, state, and federal government, as well as private foundations and the local community. Community development corporations typically provide management, financial packaging, and advocacy services to their community, but they do not usually provide the kind of architecture services that community architects provide. Instead, community development corporations often contract with private architectural firms for design and construction management services.

This is a key difference between the community development corporations in the United States and the community architecture movement that has developed in the United Kingdom since the 1960s. In addition, community architecture has been practiced in a short-term, site specific way, whereas CDCs have been set up as neighborhood institutions to provide long-term development services for their area. Since the early 1980s, popular support for the community architecture movement has grown, although community architecture remains virtually unknown in the United States at this time. This paper examines the issues of community architecture and evaluates the implications of these issues for the United States experience of community development. In particular, this study

especially considers the claims of user participation in design because this element has been conspicuously missing in community development in the United States.

There is a confusing mixture of *reality* and *myth* in the literature about community architecture. The claims made range from assertions that are easy to substantiate, to imaginary and unverifiable declarations. This is not to say that there is greater value in the reality than in the myth, but that there exists some of both. Surprisingly the myths and unfounded beliefs about community architecture are often more important and influential than the facts. The first step in separating myth from reality is to arrive at an identity of the phenomenon of community architecture.

### WHAT IS COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE?

Practitioners, advocates and critics have aptly called community architecture a *movement* because it represents a tendency or trend toward a theory of architecture. It is a movement concerned primarily with the action of making architecture--the process rather than the product. Nonetheless, most proponents claim that the built product of community architecture is often better than the product of conventional architecture.

The definitions of community architecture found in the popular literature of the movement are often nebulous and variously inclusive. Many critics suspect community architecture to be primarily mythological because of this lack of a clear definition. Advocates maintain that there is a powerful, if hard to describe, reality at the core of the movement. Many have attempted to set forth definitions. A pamphlet published by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1986,

described community architecture as follows:

"The aim of community architecture is to improve the quality of the environment by involving people in the design and management of the buildings and spaces they inhabit."<sup>2</sup>

Tom Woolley recently completed a very thorough study at Oxford Polytechnic University examining the key issues of community architecture. In his dissertation, he acknowledges the unusual problem of trying to define the movement.

"Examination of the literature about community architecture suggests that while there is no commonly accepted definition, the term signifies the recognition, among some sections of the architectural profession, of a demand from the public to play a larger part in shaping the environment. Central to this is a belief that user participation in architectural design will lead to buildings that will be more satisfactory for their occupants."<sup>3</sup>

Architectural journalists Charles Knevitt and Nick Wates, co-authors of the recent (1987) book, *Community Architecture: How People Are Creating Their Own Environment*, define it as follows: "Architecture carried out with the active participation of the end users. Term also used to describe a movement embracing community planning, community landscape, and other activities involving community technical aid."<sup>4</sup>

Another architectural journalist, Peter Buchanan, describes it as such:

"Community architecture means that the people who inhabit it are involved in and may even be instigators of, its creation and its management as well. The inhabitants are the clients; and the architect works for, or at least with them--in contrast to the typical situation where architect and user never meet."<sup>5</sup>

One of the earliest pioneers of the community architecture movement and probably its most skilled politician and proponent is Rod Hackney. Hackney was

elected to the position of president of the RIBA in 1986 and was elected president of the International Union of Architects (UIA) shortly thereafter. Hackney's election is seen by many as a kind of *coup d'etat* for the community architecture movement. Hackney also achieved another *coup* by becoming an unofficial architectural advisor to Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, who has aligned his royal patronage behind the community architecture movement. Hackney defines community architecture in very broad and inclusive terms. "Community architecture is the architecture of the community."<sup>6</sup> By which he means that it involves every facet of creating and managing the environment in which people live. Hackney has also insisted that there are no rules to community architecture. He claims it is really more "an attitude of mind" that inspires architects to take on work directly with their lower-income user-clients.

Much of what is called community architecture in England is more commonly known in the United States as community development. Wates/Knevitt, Woolley, and others from the U.K. have claimed that C. Richard Hatch's term *social architecture* is the American equivalent to community architecture. Hatch edited a book in 1984 called *The Scope of Social Architecture* that is the best collection and presentation of community architecture projects thus far assembled. However, the term social architecture is not commonly used in the United States. Yet it is interesting that the community architecture movement gives significantly more emphasis to the architect's role in the community building process than the CDCs have done in the United States. Traditionally CDCs have been directed by socially conscientious entrepreneurs and activists, but the issue of participation in design has not been a priority as it is in most community architecture projects.



### COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE ORIGINS: THE FAILURES OF THE PAST

It is obviously not a newly invented notion that user participation in the environment is important. One merely needs to retrace the steps of civilization to find innumerable examples. In most developed nations we must turn back the hands of time a few generations or look to the rural areas. In many rapidly developing nations a large proportion of the population already (or still) does participate in the shaping of their environment since they must in order to survive. It might be said that the squatter settlements in Bombay, New Delhi, Mexico City, Bangkok, and many other cities "offer" their residents the freedom to build--or the *necessity* to build to survive--that most North American and European city dwellers do not have. So when and where did community architecture become a distinct movement if in fact the same activities have been going on since the beginning of human history? The need for participation gradually grew more pressing as the common citizen realized that there was progressively less of it.

As the industrial revolution gained momentum in the early nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, it became clear to many that urban environments were growing chaotically and the living conditions were deteriorating for all but the upper classes. Families crowded into tenements without proper sanitary facilities, light, and air, suffered in miserable health and faced early death. They had little choice in where they could live because of increasing levels of congestion and the need to be near the new industries. C. Richard Hatch claims that the problems resulted ". . . not so much from the gap between client, user, and architect which followed the industrial revolution, but from the radical changes in the organization of life and work which accompanied it." However, one of the radical changes that rural newcomers found as they poured into the industrial

cities was that whereas before they had built and designed their own homes, now large landowners, industry bosses, and private capitalists hired architects and made all the decisions about the creation and management of the environment. Frederick Engels' book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* offered a graphic description of the wretched conditions in the burgeoning British cities in the 1840s. Engels pointed out that Manchester was a particularly clear example of the careless way in which industry led to growth and prosperity for a few, while the living conditions of the masses were ignored.

"When the middle classes zealously proclaim that all is well with the working classes, I cannot help feeling that the politically "progressive" industrialists, the Manchester big wigs, are not quite so innocent of this shameful piece of town planning as they pretend."<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, many reformers were criticizing the problems of urban environments. In England, several cholera epidemics broke out between 1831 and 1866 in the major cities. The reformers of this period were generally of the aristocracy or the newly emerging middle (merchant) class who tried to simultaneously raise the physical and moral standards of the working classes. But it was the fear of disease that most strongly compelled legislators to adopt fundamental sanitation laws such as the London Metropolitan Building Act of 1844, the Public Health Act of 1848 and the Lodging House Act of 1851.<sup>9</sup> Since the workers generally lacked economic power and trade unions were unevenly effective, the philanthropy and legislation of the upper class reformers was the best, if meager, hope for improved working-class conditions, short of revolution.

Local government boards were set up to monitor the sanitary conditions for rented dwellings, although it was not until the middle 1860s that enforcement began to achieve real progress in the health statistics of the poor. New, more

stringent sanitary laws were again passed in 1875 and 1890 in London.<sup>10</sup> By 1900 in London it had become evident that legislation and philanthropic capitalism were still ineffective in improving housing conditions for the working classes, so the London County Council began to build new housing for working families. The housing was badly needed, but once the local and national government became involved with public housing, the possibility for individual users to control matters of their environment became even more remote. Charles Knevitt: "As building controls became increasingly complex, architects were needed to administer and coordinate. . . . The tenant however was not consulted. Public sector housing increasingly took over as the philanthropic system proved inadequate for the task."<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, in the United States, reform activities paralleled the English experience. In 1867, the New York City Tenement House Act was the first attempt in the United States to prescribe minimum standards for fire safety, ventilation, and weather tightness. In 1879 New York State instituted new light and air regulations requiring airshafts and other standards for healthy environments (ie oldlaw tenements or so-called *dumbell plan* tenements). In 1901 the New York Tenement Law was authorized, imposing stricter residential standards, and resulting in what is known as newlaw tenements. Other American cities followed suit soon after. Unfortunately these laws did more to appease the consciences of the reformers than to help the poor. The laws were generally unenforced or unenforceable in existing buildings, and served to worsen the housing shortages because new housing developers preferred to pursue other, more profitable development opportunities.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a mixture of selfish and selfless

concerns motivated most reformers. Fears were still widespread of cholera epidemics and imminent social revolution which seemed to be stewing over the fire of working-class misery. There were many militant reformers who sought to bring about drastic changes in the system in order to alleviate the suffering brought on by intense industrialization. Jacob Riis' melancholy photographs of the slums of New York in the 1880s were a powerful catalyst, serving as both to warn and to raise the public conscience. In contrast, the Garden City proponent Ebenezer Howard, and his architect Raymond Unwin, were proposing suburban communities growing out of the utopian tradition of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. The Victorian era brought an increasing conviction that fresh air and open space were necessary for physically and morally healthy lives. By the 1870s and 1880s, the arrival of streetcars and commuter trains connecting the cities to outlying areas stirred the once remote suburbs to blossom with housing development. Still, for the working-class, even the suburban standards were considerably less luxurious than the idealized garden city plans.

Europe and the United States were awakened in the early part of the 20th century by the radical aesthetics of the new *modern* architecture. The modernists promoted the concept of functionalism as a rational basis for architectural decisions. Architectural historian Christian Norberg-Shulz emphasizes that "Functionalism was deeply concerned with man's condition and therefore paid considerable attention to the problems of human settlement."<sup>1 2</sup> The modernists had a particular concern for the housing conditions of the working-class because the level of need was staggering and because this was a field that leading architects had traditionally avoided. Norberg-Shulz claims that for Le Corbusier, the early ringleader of the modern movement, "His point of departure was a protest against the inhuman living conditions of the industrial cities of the nineteenth century."<sup>1 3</sup>

The leaders of the modern movement were dazzled by the logic and respectability of science and engineering. They saw it as their mission to use this techno-rationalism, infused with the aesthetic dogma of anti-ornamentalism, to solve the world's problems.

The modernists, like the reformers that had preceded them by many decades, were not part of the working-class and preferred to see themselves as an elite and privileged profession. Through their radical new architecture, they would mold the masses so that life would be better. In retrospect, critics like Brent Brolin have charged the modernists with being seriously remiss in understanding the future inhabitants of their schemes: "Ignoring . . .cultural differences and making most choices based on their own experience, most modern architects assumed that the user-client would become accustomed to living the way they expected them to live."<sup>14</sup>

With the tantalizing mirage of mass production and standardization on the horizon, the arrogance of the modern movement proposed huge sterile housing blocks. The rationale of providing light and air became the overriding theme and was used as a very thin veil to disguise the modernist passion for producing grandiose statements of its radical aesthetic. The monumental slabs bore no relation to the scale of the individual family or user; they bore a closer relation to the size of the egos of the designers. Bruno Taut claimed "Today the architect must be leader in everything, the one who leads forward into a more beautiful and lucid future."<sup>15</sup> Woe to the poor user-clients if they did not see the future with the same lucidity as the master builders Le Corbusier, Mies, Taut, Gropius, *et al.*

The myopic vision and desire of the masters caused them to deny their own arguments for the new architecture. While modern architecture was supposed to

be a clear manifestation of the function happening inside, there were few, if any, honest efforts made to try to understand the functions of the dwelling environment. The so-called sociological research upon which the modern masters based their functionalist schemes was little more than the opinions of very influential aesthetic arbiters.

"The Bauhaus claimed to have a scientific basis for identifying and accommodating people's social needs in its sociological approach. Its major finding, which was in fact neither sociological nor scientific, was the supposed *minimum sociological standard* for every person."<sup>16</sup>

Gropius claimed that "The fear that individuality will be crushed out by the growing "tyranny" of standardization is the sort of myth which cannot sustain the briefest examination."<sup>17</sup> In retrospect, we see that such a "myth" should have been examined much less briefly.

As suggested earlier, the beginning of the participatory design movement came about as critics and designers began to realize the failings of the existing systems of architecture and town planning. The Italian anarchist architect Giancarlo De Carlo described the process by which modern architecture became less and less effective in solving the real problems of the environment.

"Through losing knowledge of the context, the original intentions of the Modern Movement were first altered, then nullified. Consequently, the only alternative left was escape into the hot arrogance of art or the cool neutrality of techniques -- the excitement of aesthetic research or the comfortable tranquility of professional practice."<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1960s it was becoming obvious that the massive public housing programs of the United Kingdom and the United States were not the panacea that was hoped for. The LeCorbusier-inspired highrise slab blocks proved

to be even more oppressive than the crowded slums they replaced. A new wave of highly critical books and articles pointed out the failures of modern planning, especially with respect to housing. Jane Jacobs' book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Catherine Bauer's articles in *Architectural Forum* (1957), a new reprint of Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* (1960), and John Habraken's *Supports* were highly critical of the modernist solutions. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright comments that many of these works ". . .denounced the antiseptic high-rise towers of modern apartment buildings and public housing projects--branding the kind of architecture as antithetical to urban life."<sup>19</sup>

The housing disasters experienced in the U.K. and in the U.S. by the 1960s galvanized popular opinion against modern planning and design practices. The urban renewal program in the U.S. was nicknamed "urban removal". Many low-income "slums" were demolished to make way for high-rise housing projects, new highways and commercial areas. The story of the St. Louis Pruitt-Igoe project fiasco and that of Boston's Urban Villagers whose houses were eradicated in the West End neighborhood, are among the most infamous American examples. Similarly, huge housing projects had been built in the U.K. with nearly identical flaws. As Tom Woolley asserts:

"The development of community architecture can, in the main, be traced from the major changes in housing policy in the U.K. in the late 1960s. Programmes which involved wholesale demolition of older housing areas were abandoned and new measures were introduced to encourage local authorities and private house owners to renovate the existing housing stock."<sup>20</sup>

Retracing our steps for a moment, we can find some early dissenting voices amidst the tide of modern failures. The British botanist-urban planner Sir Patrick Geddes was one of the earliest writers on town planning to emphasize the need for

environmental control by ordinary citizens. Colin Ward, a prolific British author on the subject of user control, describes Geddes' book *Cities in Evolution* (1915) as "a treatise on environmental self-education of the ordinary citizen"<sup>21</sup> Geddes was convinced that it was extremely important that ordinary citizens learn about "civics." His invention of "civic exhibitions" was to be a means for receiving design suggestions "from all quarters, both professional and lay"<sup>22</sup> in the process of town planning. Geddes' ideas remained fairly obscure until the end of the Second World War when a second edition of *Cities in Evolution* was published.

A small group of young architects and anarchists began to re-examine Geddes' ideas and the ideas of Lewis Mumford from his *The Culture of Cities*. John F.C. Turner and W.P. Keating Clay were students at the Architectural Association in London when they helped prepare information for an appendix to the 1948 reprint of the Geddes book. Turner and fellow student Patrick Crooke came into contact with Colin Ward and Giancarlo De Carlo in 1952. These four began working out the early issues of the participatory process. Their ideas were published in the anarchist newspaper *Freedom* and in the Italian anarchist journal *Volonta*.

In 1956, Turner and Crooke were invited to Peru to work on low-income housing problems in Lima. The self-help efforts of squatters there impressed them as a powerful untapped force. Turner began to realize the tremendous potential of user involvement in terms of efficiency and economy. He began to write about the *barriadas*, claiming that there was a beauty and appropriateness in the self-help settlements that should be recognized, appreciated and encouraged. In 1963 he prepared material for a special issue of the journal *Architectural Design* entitled "Dwelling Resources in Latin America". Turner argued that no government



"however wealthy...can possibly finance more than a small proportion of the total demand for housing."<sup>23</sup> In 1966 Turner presented a paper at the United Nations on "Uncontrolled Urban Settlements". This paper was very convincing, and it persuaded governments to move forward with the idea of "sites and services" projects. In the developing world, these ideas of user control affected a large number of policies and projects for many years.

Colin Ward observed in the 1970s that the ideas of citizen control had finally gained some institutional acceptance. "The reason why opinions of people like us [Colin Ward, John Turner, De Carlo, *et.al.*] have suddenly become interesting is that official housing policy has become not only financially, but also ideologically bankrupt."<sup>24</sup>

The Dutch architect John Habraken commented about the motivations of the participation movement in retrospect:

"The so-called participation movement was basically a reaction to the tacit belief that professionals could do it all. . . . Participation is advocated, in whatever form, by those who refuse the paternalistic model and know that experience and knowledge resides with lay people as much as with experts."<sup>25</sup>

The failures of the past have for some time pointed out the need for changes in the architectural profession, particularly with respect to urban residential environments. The architectural and planning failures of the past, as painful and costly as they have been, now offer the professions an invaluable resource for the future. The age old aphorism about the importance of learning from past mistakes must be heeded here. The crucial question is: What are the lessons to be learned from these failures?

The "conventional professional" analysis of the modernist failures would

claim that the method was fundamentally sound, but that mistakes were made because of insufficient research and insensitive design. From this point of view what is needed is better professional judgements based on more thorough expert advice correctly *anticipating* the needs of the future users. Such authors as Oscar Newman, Alice Coleman, and Clare Cooper-Marcus have produced very influential psychological and sociological research on housing planning. In sharp contrast, the community architecture analysis would attribute most of the blame for modernist failures on its fundamentally flawed methodology, that is, the lack of user involvement in design and the top-down approach to design, production and management. While accepting the importance of expert research, community architects believe that interaction with the client is the best way to elicit and solve their housing needs. As Colin Ward proposed, "When we build again, we need not a plan for housing, but an attitude that will enable millions of people to make their own plans."<sup>26</sup> Thus, community architects claim to have learned a different lesson from the mistakes of the past, and this is the important theoretical point at which they diverge radically from conventional professionals.

#### **THE TECHNIQUES OF COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE: ARE THEY DIFFERENT?**

Assuming that community architects and conventional architects are at opposite ends of the professional spectrum--as Wates/Knevitt seem to imply in their obviously biased chart "What Makes Community Architecture Different?" (see figure 1.)--and assuming that they have learned different lessons from the failures of the past, then one would suspect that the techniques that community architects would use would be much different from those of their counterparts. The most notable distinction, however, between a community architecture practice and a conventional practice is not so much the "new techniques," but the fact that the

## What Makes Community Architecture Different

	<i>Conventional architecture</i>	<i>Community architecture</i>
Status of user	Users are passive recipients of an environment conceived, executed, managed and evaluated by others: corporate, public or private sector landowners and developers with professional 'experts'.	Users are – or are treated as – the clients. They are offered (or take) control of commissioning, designing, developing, managing and evaluating their environment, and may sometimes be physically involved in construction.
User/expert relationship	Remote, arm's length. Little if any direct contact. Experts – commissioned by landowners and developers – occasionally make superficial attempts to define and consult end-users, but their attitudes are mostly paternalistic and patronizing.	Creative alliance and working partnership. Experts are commissioned by, and are accountable to, users, or behave as if they are.
Expert's role	Provider, neutral bureaucrat, elitist, 'one of them', manipulator of people to fit the system, a professional in the institutional sense. Remote and inaccessible.	Enabler, facilitator and 'social entrepreneur', educator, 'one of us', manipulator of the system to fit the people and challenger of the status quo; a professional as a competent and efficient adviser. Locally based and accessible.
Scale of project	Generally large and often cumbersome. Determined by pattern of land ownership and the need for efficient mass production and simple management.	Generally small, responsive and determined by the nature of the project, the local building industry and the participants. Large sites generally broken down into manageable packages.
Location of project	Fashionable and wealthy existing residential, commercial and industrial areas preferred. Otherwise a green-field site with infrastructure (roads, power, water supply and drainage, etc.); i.e. no constraints.	Anywhere, but most likely to be urban, or periphery of urban areas; area of single or multiple deprivation; derelict or decaying environment.
Use of project	Likely to be a single function or two or three complementary activities (e.g. commercial, or housing, or industrial).	Likely to be multi-functional.
Design style	Self-conscious about style; most likely 'international' or 'modern movement'. Increasingly one of the other fashionable and identifiable styles: Post-Modern, Hi-tech, Neo-vernacular or Classical Revival. Restrained and sometimes frigid; utilitarian.	Unselfconscious about style. Any 'style' may be adopted as appropriate. Most likely to be 'contextual', 'regional' (place-specific) with concern for identity. Loose and sometimes exuberant; often highly decorative, using local artists.
Technology/resources	Tendency towards: mass production, prefabrication, repetition, global supply of materials, machine-friendly technology, 'clean sweep' and new build, machine intensive, capital intensive.	Tendency towards: small-scale production, on-site construction, individuality, local supply of materials, user-friendly (convivial) technology, re-use, recycling and conservation, labour and time intensive.
End product	Static, slowly deteriorates, hard to manage and maintain, high-energy consumption.	Flexible, slowly improving, easy to manage and maintain, low-energy consumption.
Primary motivation	<i>Private sector:</i> return on investment (usually short-term) and narrow self-interest. <i>Public sector:</i> social welfare and party political opportunism. <i>Experts:</i> esteem from professional peers. Response to general national or regional gap in market, or social needs and opportunities.	Improvement of quality of life for individuals and communities. Better use of local resources. Social investment. Response to specific localized needs and opportunities.
Method of operation	Top-down, emphasis on product rather than process, bureaucratic, centralized with specialisms compartmentalized, stop-go, impersonal, anonymous, paper management, avoid setting a precedent, secretive.	Bottom-up, emphasis on process rather than product, flexible, localized, holistic and multi-disciplinary, evolutionary, continuous, personal, familiar, people management, setting precedents, open.
Ideology	Totalitarian, technocratic and doctrinaire (Left or Right) big is beautiful, competition, survival of the fittest.	Pragmatic, humanitarian, responsive and flexible, small is beautiful, collaboration, mutual aid.

FIGURE 1

same *very old* techniques that architects have used for wealthy, private and corporate clients are now being used with new clients: the traditionally disenfranchised poor.

The broadly inclusive definition of community architecture complicates the task of identifying the techniques and skills that community architects utilize. Community architecture has been characterized by such wide ranging definitions that it is not surprising to find that many of the skills are not provided in a normal course of architectural instruction. Colin Ward says:

" . . . the services and know-how needed by local residents seeking to rehouse themselves or to improve their housing and its surroundings are not usually those which call for the capacity for design which is associated with the education and training of architects. . . . This kind of know-how is not at all architectural, it is more akin to the "fixer" in Eastern Europe, who gains a living from his [or her] knowledge of The System and How to Manipulate It. Architects themselves can be as innocent as babes in the woods when they first get involved in its intricacies. And it demands a certain sophisticated cunning rather than radical commitment.<sup>27</sup>

As a further illustration of the multiplicity of meanings of the term community architect, Rod Hackney says "The community architect may not even be an architect."<sup>28</sup> Hackney nonetheless believes that architects are often the ones best suited to the job because they combine skills for organizing, communicating, and envisioning the environment as it will appear when constructed. But there are many other professions besides architecture that provide key building-related services. Attorneys, entrepreneurs, sociologists, engineers, construction managers, accountants, politicians and others play crucial, sometimes even central roles in the development process. While it is quaintly attractive to think of the community architect as a sort of environmental "fixer", in our more restricted western societies it is often not that simple. To successfully

make even a small development work, it often requires considerable expertise with tax laws, finance, legal arrangements, accounting, as well as design, engineering, and construction management skills. It is very rare to find all these skills in one person (the mythical community architect) or even in one architecture firm. If the community architecture movement were to depend on such superhumans the projects would be few and far between.

If, indeed there are differences between community architecture and conventional architecture, there are also differences of opinion about how to practice this new kind of architecture. On the one hand, there are some practitioners who contest that community architecture is not different from conventional architecture except that there is a bit more concern for user consultation. In this study, a number of informal interviews were conducted with architects in England. They often commented that they believed community architecture was much like conventional architecture with a little more emphasis on contact with the users. Tom Woolley reports similar results from his own interviews. "Many seemed to feel that their normal approach to design, coupled with a few meetings with the user clients would be quite adequate for most purposes."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, many architects who practice community architecture may do so in the morning, while they practice conventional architecture in the afternoons, so to speak. In my research, however, I noted that private-practice architects did not emphasize the need for special training, while architects who were working for voluntary organizations and technical aid centers emphasized the need more strongly.

Both Woolley and Wates/Knevitt agree with Ward's assessment of the basic inadequacy of current training for community architects. Woolley says that

"Research in the field of how architects design, tends to suggest that conventional practice is quite inadequate in understanding and interpreting users needs."<sup>30</sup> Wates/Knevitt emphasize that "Putting community architecture into practice involves a radical restructuring of the development industry. . . . The participants--whether community groups, technical advisors, political administrators or funding agencies--are having to devise new roles and responsibilities."<sup>31</sup>

Wates and Knevitt have assembled a compendium of the tools available to community architects.<sup>32</sup> Although they call them "new" techniques, many of the methods have been in use for many years, even centuries. Often these techniques are used with slight modifications to account for differing needs of communities of clients. A few other techniques that were drawn from other community architecture literature have been added to the Wates/Knevitt list. I have then grouped the techniques into three categories as a way to show three important functions that community architecture techniques attempt to fulfill.

#### **Category 1 - Communication Techniques, Community Building**

Social Surveys  
 Design Meetings  
 Public Meetings  
 Site Offices at Project  
 Ceremonies  
 Public Competitions  
 Publicity  
 Television and Cable  
 Wall Charts

#### **Category 2 - Educational Techniques, Illustrative aids**

Slide Shows  
 Visits to Other Schemes  
 Full-Scale Mock-Ups  
 Videos

Drawing  
Models  
Role-Playing

**Category 3 - User Involvement Techniques, Design Parameters**

Plan Books  
Take-Home Designer Kits  
SAR Supports and Infill  
*Alexander's A Pattern Language*  
Self-Help/Self-Build  
Modular Components

The techniques listed in Category 1 are methods by which community architects can communicate with and organize much larger client groups than are typically dealt with in traditional practice. The use of public meetings, design meetings, publicity, and even television are important because of the size of client groups. Community meetings and discussion forums draw people together more efficiently and inexpensively than individual meetings with the clients. Also, many decisions must be made collectively, and thus public meetings are needed to fully deal with the issues. In conventional architecture, design decisions affecting communities are often made by an individual or small group of people (*ie.* the speculative developer), so public meetings carry much less importance. In the U.S., because participatory design has not been emphasized, public reviews are often bureaucratic procedures that do not include the future residents. The technique of social surveys is not a new idea in determining user needs. What is different is the idea of having the architect be the one who is conducting the surveys. Some community architects believe that this is very important, not so much to gain statistical information, but more as a mechanism for the architect to come into personal contact with the users, and to be able to see firsthand their current living situations. Ceremonies and festivals can be a technique for informally building community ties. The long process of design and construction

can lead to discouragement for participants, so having gatherings that are fun is important for keeping spirits up.

Probably the most typical feature in a community architecture practice is to have a site office at the project. The simple factor of a physical presence on the site gives clients an informal meeting place to discuss issues with other clients and the architects. All the elements relevant to the design are present at one place: the physical context, the architects, the drawings and schemes, and the future users. Wall charts and posters can be mounted in the site office to convey information quickly to the many clients who wander in and out. Often the site office is most busy at the end of the working day and on weekends when the clients are free from their regular jobs.

The techniques listed in Category 2 are intended to assist the community architect's clients in understanding the visual language of architecture so that they can make better decisions about their future environment. Many times community architects will be working with clients who have little or no building experience. Unlike conventional architects who typically work with experienced professional developers, the community architect may be required to do more educating of the inexperienced client so they can read building plans and visualize three dimensional spaces. Obviously these techniques are not really new to architects. Conventional architects often must work with inexperienced developers or directly with wealthy residential clients who need all these same services for the same reasons. Few private clients have received prior training in architecture or building, so it is incumbent upon the architect to be able to explain the language of architecture and to make a vision of the future environment accessible to the clients. Role-playing is a technique that elicits personal and social information from the users that they



may not have been aware of otherwise. If, for example, the users are asked to role-play their activities on a holiday weekend, the architect may discover spatial needs that would not have emerged from merely looking at the plans. The architect, whose special expertise and experience should include knowledge of a wide variety of alternative spatial solutions, can use any of the techniques listed in this Category 2 to propose design possibilities, previously unknown by the community.

The techniques grouped into Category 3 are techniques that have been developed to simplify and improve user involvement in the design and construction process. These are important because of the larger number of individual clients that the community architect must deal with. For the fees that are typically available, it would be inconceivable for an architect to design every house "from scratch" with the client. Community architects, however, see the participatory design process as a rigorous form of inquiry into the needs of the users, and thus it is necessary to accurately solve their individual problems. The Stichting Architecten Research (SAR) process, in Holland, for example, is a carefully refined technique which sets up a hierarchy of systems and uses modular dimensioning so that users can design their own environment within parameters set by the system. The SAR ideas, developed by the architect N.J. Habraken, rationalize the process of user involvement so that designs can be efficient, flexible, and easy for inexperienced users to work with. The plan book method is another method that simplifies user participation by promoting selection and modification rather design from scratch. Plan books have been used by architects for centuries. In the United States, thousands of Victorian houses were built in the late nineteenth century according to the plan books of Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux. After the turn of the twentieth century, it was even possible to purchase mail-order

houses from the plan book catalogs of companies like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. In the Weller Streets Cooperative and the Eldonian Cooperative in Liverpool, community architect Bill Halsall developed a small book of plans for the cooperative members to select from and modify. Christopher Alexander's book, *A Pattern Language* has been used by both architects and users to identify design features that are time-honored but often forgotten. His book provides a structure to help clients and architects select features that they might otherwise overlook. In some cases community architecture involves the users in the actual construction of the project through the use of self-help/self-build. In this way the users can save expenses as well as make a wide variety of choices about the design and materials in their project. The limitations of self-build are many, but if the clients are able-bodied and interested, there is much to be gained as well. The trend in self-built projects has been to simplify the building process using standardized materials and simple connections so that the level of skill and time required is minimized.

### **IDENTIFYING THE CLAIMS OF COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE**

The fundamental claim of community architecture is that user involvement offers a different and better methodological approach to the creation and management of the environment. As we look critically at elaborations to this claim, we find that myth and reality are intertwined, even knotted together, in the assertions that are made about community architecture. Tom Woolley says "Study of much of the ephemeral literature on community architecture suggests that there seems to be almost no limit to the claims which are made by the protagonists of community architecture."<sup>33</sup> The claims range from technical rationales to political, economic, and moral justifications.

It is no small wonder that theorists and critics of community architecture are disturbed by the breadth and vast scope of the claims of community architecture. The term community architecture as it is being used in the United Kingdom encompasses a multitude of activities and professions. Perhaps it is only because of the word *architecture* that critics have looked so skeptically at the claims that are made by community architecture's proponents. The community development corporation movement in the United States has been subject to much research and criticism, but there has not been the same concern for sociological and psychological justification of its techniques. Whether or not community development corporations are more efficient, or produce greater user satisfaction seems to be less important than the fact that they are politically justified because they fulfill a demand for development control by a community.

Drawing from an extensive survey of the literature I have classified the many different claims into the following general headings:

- **User participation leads to greater user satisfaction.**
- **User participation is more economical, at least in the long-term.**
- **User participation produces psychological and sociological benefits.**

**Claim: Participation Leads to Greater User Satisfaction**

The claim of greater user satisfaction is the central and most important claim made about community architecture. The proof or refutation of this claim is highly charged politically. But the claim is also very complex and thus hard to evaluate. Woolley has enumerated three sub-propositions to this claim which are

meant to identify three possible relationships between the variables in the process.

(see figure 2.) They are:

- a) The level of user satisfaction is related to the effect that the clients had on the product.
- b) The level of user satisfaction is related to the degree to which the architect could effectively interpret and incorporate users' needs and ideas through the participation process.
- c) The level of user satisfaction is related, not to the product, but to the nature of the process and the degree of control which they had over it.

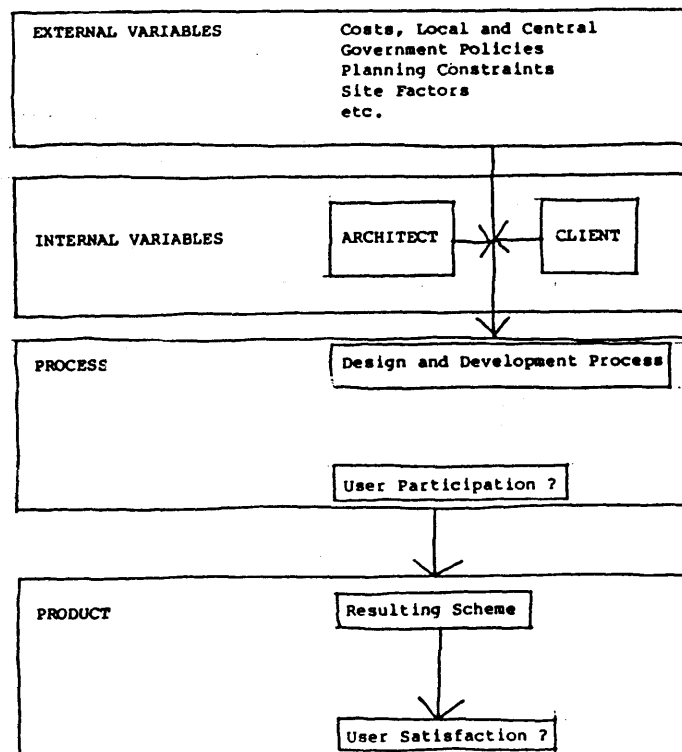


FIGURE 2

Many other architects have written different variations of the claims about greater user satisfaction, but few have said it as clearly and passionately as John Turner did in his 1972 book *Freedom to Build*.

"When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction, or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for big decisions in the housing process, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfillment and a burden to the economy."<sup>3 4</sup>

Turner arrived at two other conclusions about the value of participation. Colin Ward called these "Turner's second and third laws of housing." According to Turner:

" 2. The most important thing about housing is not what it is but what it does in people's lives: dweller satisfaction is not necessarily related to the imposition of material standards. 3. Deficiencies and imperfections in your housing are infinitely more tolerable if they are your responsibility than if they are somebody else's."<sup>3 5</sup>

Tom Woolley encountered many problems in evaluating dweller satisfaction that he felt may have biased the data. "... it was recognized that the production and design of buildings is a very complex process in which a large number of variables interact and that it would be extremely hard to find a methodology by which the variable of user participation could be isolated from the other factors."<sup>3 6</sup> In one case that Woolley studied, he recognized the possibility of "client loyalty" stemming from defensiveness about the problems that resulted from their own participation. He felt that it was clear that some tenants "saw themselves as propagandists for the cause of housing cooperatives and tenant participation and

that this coloured their response."<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, Woolley learned that some of the tenants had already received so much attention from other researchers that they were not pleased with the amount of time and energy they were being asked to give to the surveys. This observation by Woolley is probably a manifestation of an important behavioral phenomenon known as the Hawthorne effect. The Hawthorne effect indicates that the sentiments and behavior of a population can be altered by the mere presence of researchers involved in a study of that population.<sup>38</sup> Woolley also raises the important consideration that client satisfaction can be affected by factors that are largely outside the particular housing being studied. For example, the previous quality of the residents living conditions' plays a large part in the satisfaction they have with their present environment. Likewise the quality of other housing that might be available to the residents can influence their stated satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

C. Richard Hatch wisely points out that there is yet another fundamental problem in measuring the level of user satisfaction. He notes that most studies have focused on the satisfaction of individuals and families as opposed to the collective satisfaction of the community. Hatch calls this emphasis on the private realm "questionable" since it is only one aspect of a larger analysis that is needed.<sup>39</sup>

**Claim: Participation is More Economical, at Least in the Long-Term.**

To realistically understand whether participation is more economical, both short-term and long-term costs versus benefits must be considered. The shorter term analysis reflects the characteristics of speed and efficiency of the production

techniques. The long-term analysis is partly a revelation of the initial quality of the product, but more importantly it signifies social costs and benefits. The level of user respect for the environment and continued involvement of the users in maintenance play an enormous part in the long-term economic evaluation.

Community architects generally have not claimed that their method is more economical in the short-term, unless self-help labor is involved in the construction. Participatory design has thus far always required allocating more time to numerous individual clients and/or client groups. The architectural office of Hunt Thompson, which has claimed to practice community architecture in some of the work it undertakes, estimates that community architecture adds about 20 percent to the architect's costs for services.<sup>40</sup> Many other community architecture firms acknowledge that participation takes more time and that they usually take a financial loss in that aspect. Although there are occasionally architects who are willing and able to subsidize the cost of their time to low-income clients, the leading advocates of the community architecture movement realize that the viability of the method must not depend entirely on benevolence.

The attempts at innovation in participatory design techniques are often aimed at trying to reduce the time that the architect must spend with the client while maintaining or increasing the quality of the service provided. This dilemma of providing the same services faster is a central issue in the economics of participatory design. The disasters of the 1950s and 1960s housing schemes are partially a result of architects trying to provide what they thought were the same services to clients in a mass produced, faster way. Economists Baumol and Blinder and others have called this effect "the cost disease of personal services". While there have historically been tremendous increases in productivity in the

manufacturing sector of the economy due to greater efficiencies in mass production, traditionally the personal service sector (professions such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and architects) has not increased its productivity at the same rate as the manufacturing sector. This is primarily because the quality of services depends to a large degree on the time spent in personal contact. What has tended to happen is that the quality of personal professional services has been traded off for greater speed in an attempt to match the increasing productivity of the manufacturing and construction sectors of the economy.<sup>4 1</sup>

When self-help labor or management is involved, community architecture is often claimed to be more economical in the short-term, or production phase. Rod Hackney has said "We must see ordinary people as a resource. In reality, they are of far greater value than expensive North Sea oil, or difficult to extract British coal."<sup>4 2</sup> He has said elsewhere that "Community architecture creates wealth for those ordinary people who participate in it."<sup>4 3</sup> On the other hand, geographer Rod Burgess has argued that self-help housing is in fact not really more economical, but it takes advantage of the under-valorization of the users labor.<sup>4 4</sup> If a program of self-help housing is advocated it is also only cheaper for the State because the State must provide less. Self-help housing solutions are more economical for the user only if they cannot find higher-valued employment elsewhere so that they could pay someone else to build or supervise the building of their house. Hackney's assumption is that the users cannot find higher-paying employment and, in fact he assumes (rightly so in many cases in the U.K.) that they cannot find any employment elsewhere; thus, because they are idle, they are an untapped resource.

To reiterate, the majority of claims about the economy of community



architecture relate to its long-term benefits. The RIBA and the Institute of Housing (IOH) have produced a joint study *Tenant Participation in Design*. The claim is made that "Like most services to customers, value for money must be the goal, but tenant participation tackled with care will yield extremely good value for money--any increase in overall costs being offset by much greater customer satisfaction with longer term benefits."<sup>45</sup> The economy is claimed because overall the project will be less vandalized, resulting in lower maintenance costs. Prince Charles, who has become an avid patron of community architecture, argues that "They [client users] are now responsible for the maintenance of their properties and that fact alone has virtually eliminated the vandalism that was previously so rife."<sup>46</sup> The long-term economies depend greatly on the psychological and sociological factors of satisfaction, control, and responsibility. Rod Hackney says in an article in C. Richard Hatch's book *The Scope of Social Architecture* that "Costs will be greatly reduced and a worthwhile exercise will be carried out with those most intimately involved in the rehabilitation--that is the residents--having played a major role in their housing improvement and repairs."<sup>47</sup> Colin Ward has repeatedly stressed the issue of long-term economy where users have control of their housing. He claims that "owner-occupied housing goes on forever. It is improved, extended, updated, by one generation after another."<sup>48</sup> Whereas public housing often has an abnormally short lifespan despite the fact that it was nearly always built to much higher original standards.

Thus far no serious research has been undertaken that realistically and fairly appraises the long-term economic value of community architecture. There are many stories of graffiti-free walls and neat gardens and courtyards, but there have been no economic investigations attempted. Thus the long-term economics remains an open question.

**Claim: User Participation Produces Psychological and Sociological Benefits.**

The assertion of psychological and sociological benefits comes dangerously close to the notion of architectural determinism, which environmental psychologists have long dismissed as being too simplistic.<sup>49</sup> The claim is more complex than the notion of architectural determinism however, since it is argued that the process of making the environment, as well as the qualities of the built product, affects the behavior of the users. Occasionally, the more ambitious advocates of community architecture claim very direct links from the process to behavior. Woolley refers to C. Richard Hatch's book *The Scope of Social Architecture*, and warns that "In this, the most comprehensive anthology so far published, Hatch appears to be reviving the old discredited notions of determinism."<sup>50</sup>

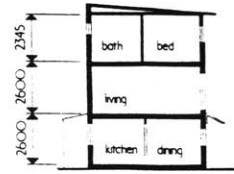
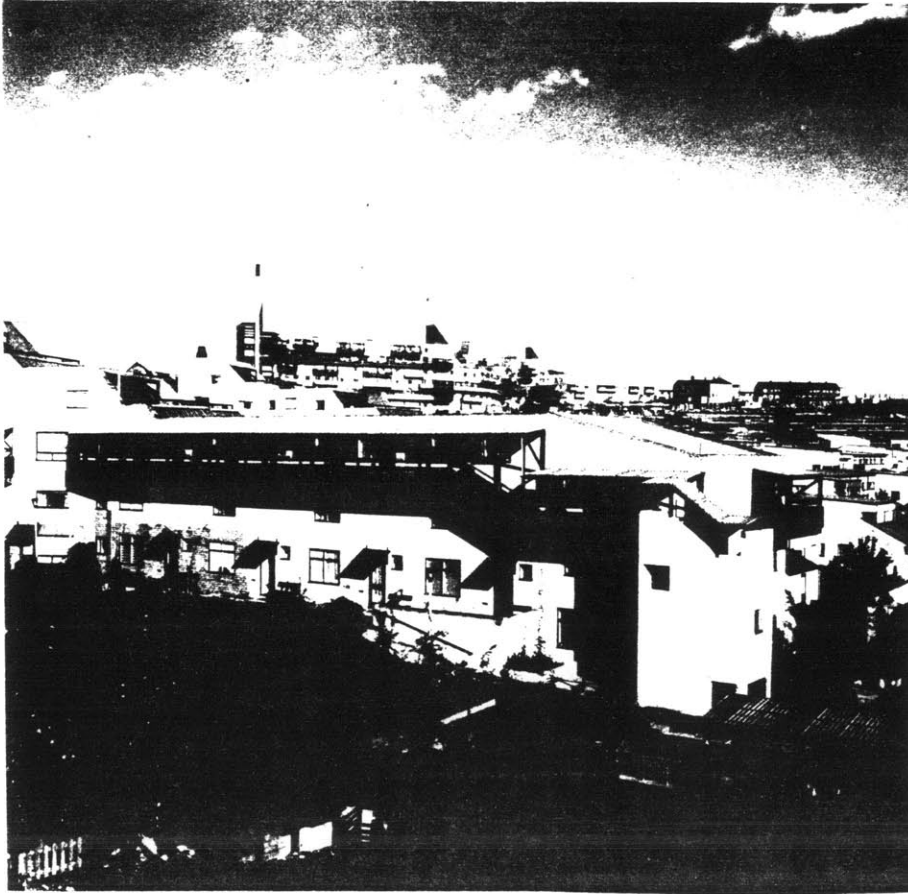
Without doubt the protagonists of community architecture have felt a need to propagandize regarding the benefits of the movement. Architectural journalist Nick Wates has claimed that ". . .the process of involvement, combined with the better end product, can create employment, can help reduce crime, vandalism, mental stress, ill health and the potential for urban unrest. . ."<sup>51</sup> In 1985, C. Richard Hatch theorized that "The paramount purpose of participation is not good buildings, but good citizens in a good society. Participation is the means, and the richer the experience. . . the greater the impact on alienation will be and the greater the recovery towards health."<sup>52</sup> The architect John Thompson of Hunt Thompson Associates claims that one year after part of the Lea View Estate in the London borough of Hackney had been renovated using community architecture the result was as follows: "Released from the oppression of the old buildings, the

tenants' lives have blossomed."<sup>53</sup>

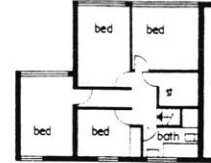
### **EVALUATING THE CLAIMS OF COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE: WHAT IS MYTH AND WHAT IS REAL?**

There are many difficulties inherent in attempts to investigate the claims of community architecture, not the least of which is the vague definition of the movement. The type and degree of participation in projects labelled as community architecture varies widely, as does the scale and complexity of the projects. Only a handful of cases have been researched by sociologists and environmental psychologists, while a larger number have been more superficially examined in professional architectural journals and the popular press. The cases that researchers have studied are full of the usual intricacies of the housing process, and thus it is impossible to compare results in a laboratory-like, controlled way. In many ways, this observation supports the commitment of community architects to deal directly with each unique client on their project. Nonetheless, the studies of community architecture projects that have been done go a long way towards clarifying what is myth and what is reality.

In surveying a number of well known cases of community architecture one can investigate the three general claims which were described in the previous chapter. It should be remembered that the brief descriptions of the projects presented here are so condensed that in many ways they do a disservice to the complexity and character of the particular schemes. (See figures 3 thru 7 on the following pages for images of the projects.) Indeed, each of these projects could easily be the subject for several volumes about its history and nuances. In fact at least one project already has had a book written about it.



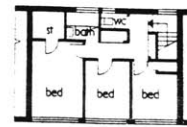
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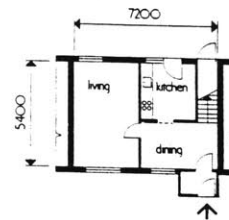
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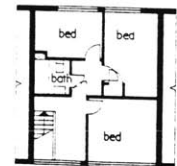
Ground floor, six-person.



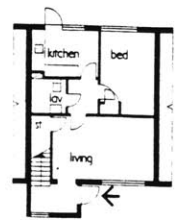
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Ground floor, four-person.

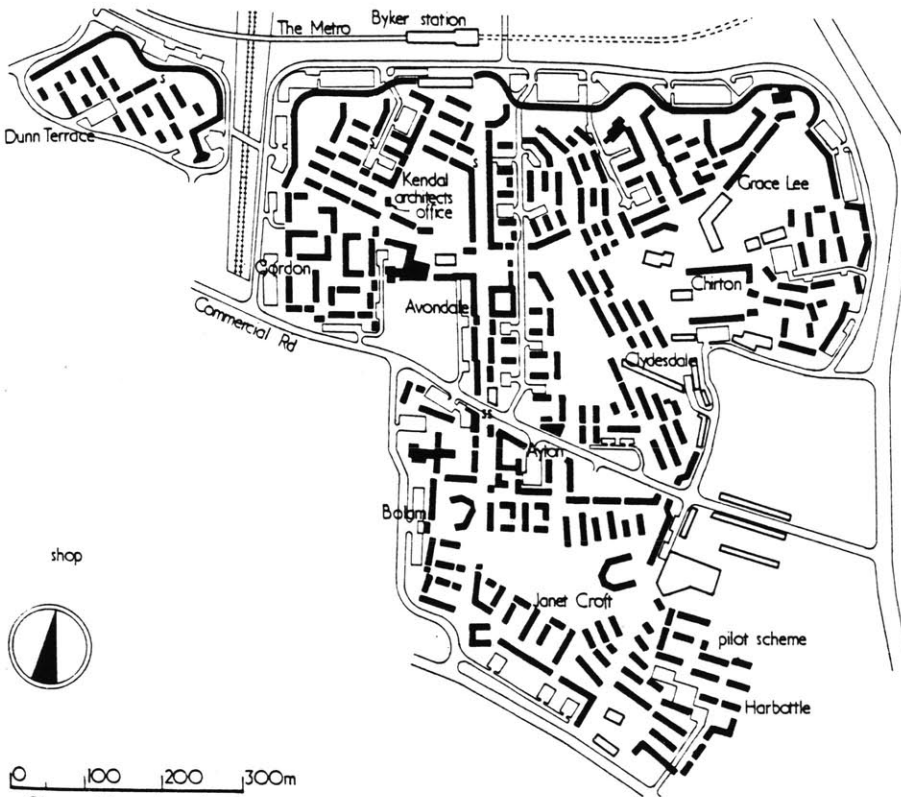


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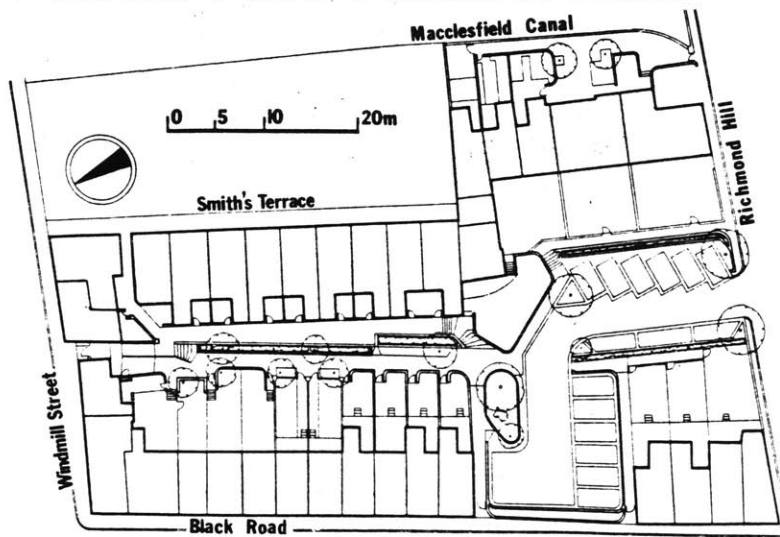
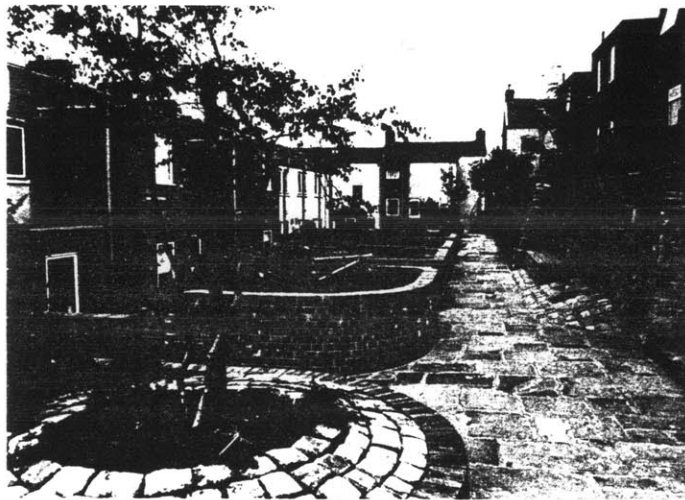
Ground floor, five-person.

Typical plans.

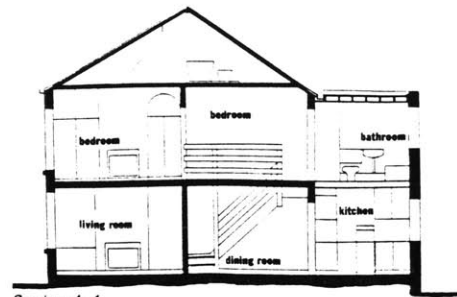


Site and location plan.

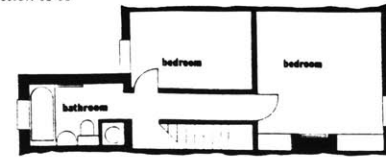
FIGURE 3  
THE BYKER WALL, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE



Layout after improvement.



Section A-A



4 Smith's Terrace first floor (after).



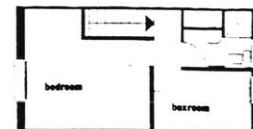
4 Smith's Terrace ground floor (after).



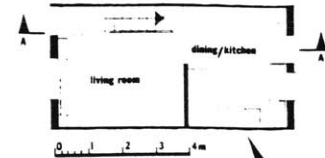
Ground floor (before). First floor (before).



Section A-A



222 Black Road: first floor (after).



222 Black Road: ground floor (after).

FIGURE 4  
BLACK ROAD, MACCLESFIELD

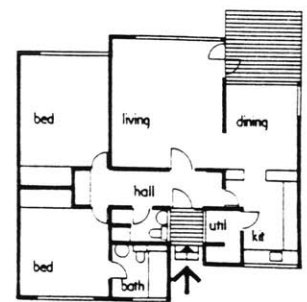
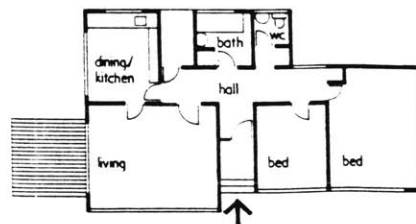
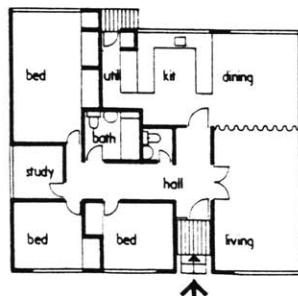
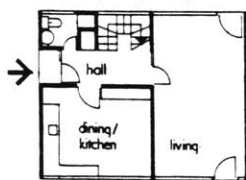
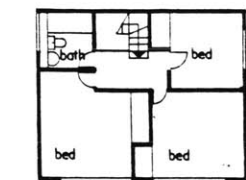
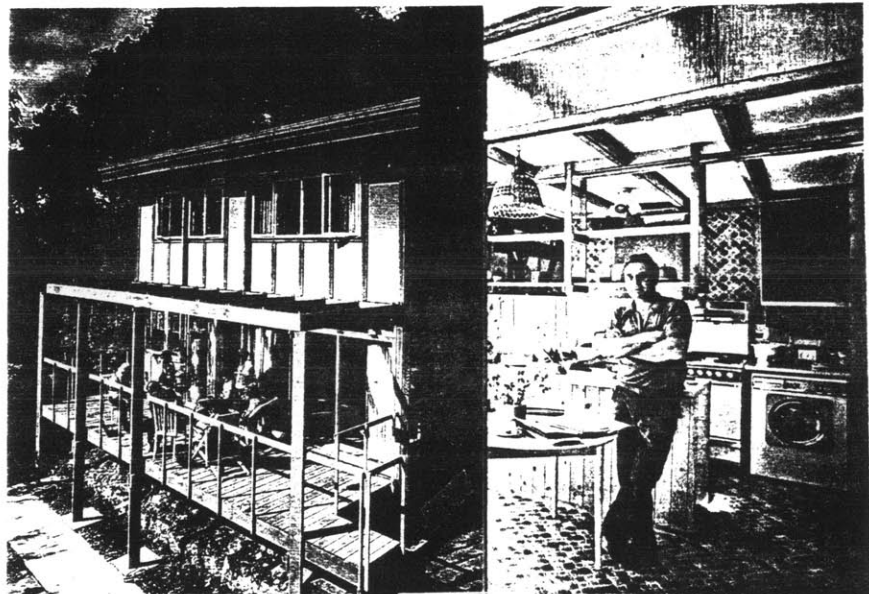
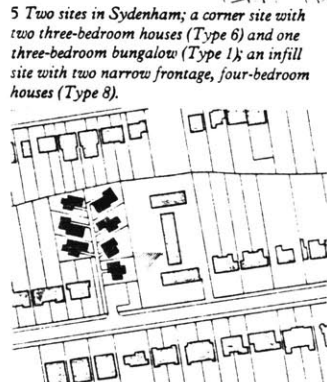
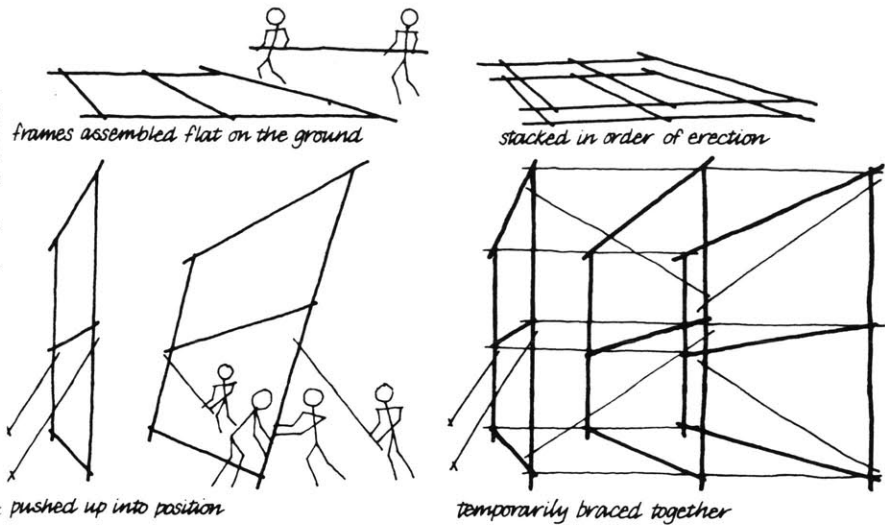
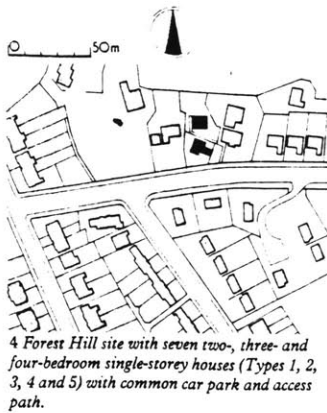
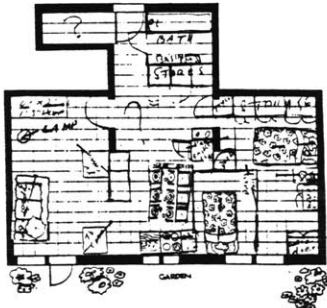
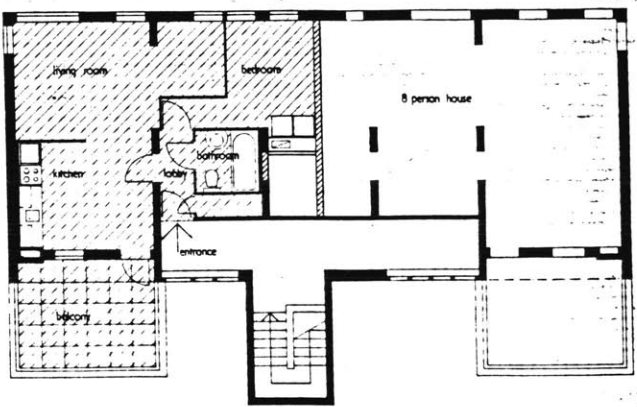
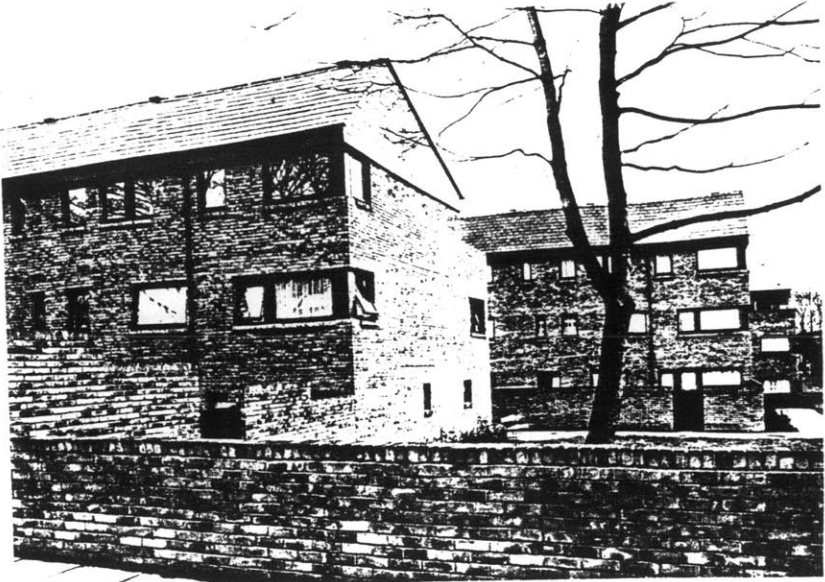
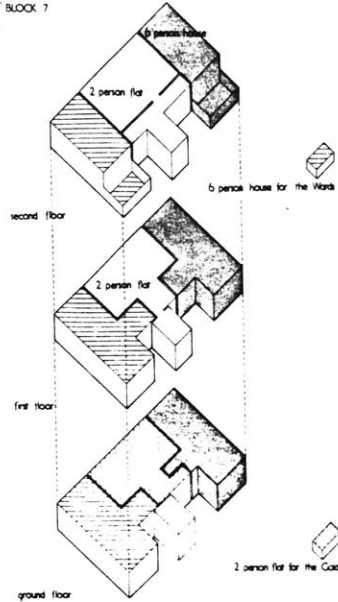


FIGURE 5  
LEWISHAM SELF-BUILD COOPERATIVE



21 Nabs Hamdi had to create a whole new series of communication aids: tools which allow people to take control of how they wish to organise their space and yet, at the same time, face them with the consequences of their decisions. Specially drawn gridded floors with pin-on furniture was one of the tools used.

22 Second floor plan of Cynthia Thumbwood's flat. Tone indicates planning grid.

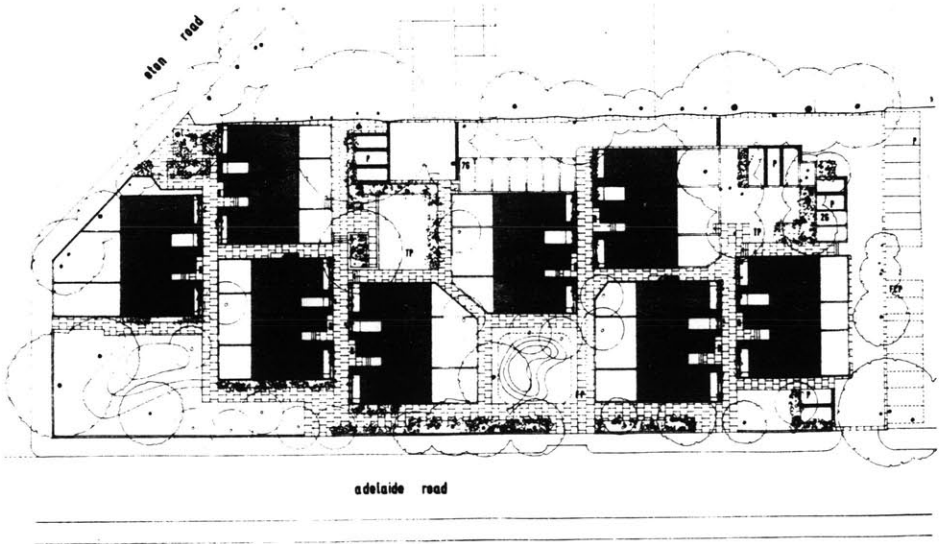


FIGURE 6  
ADELAIDE ROAD, CAMDEN

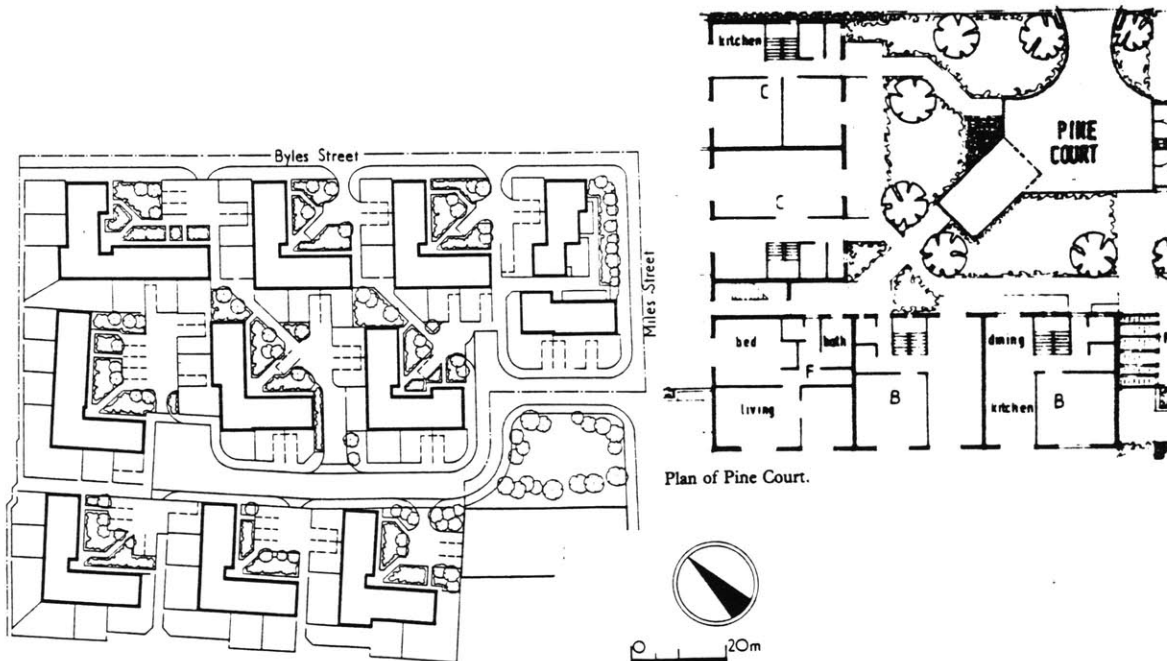
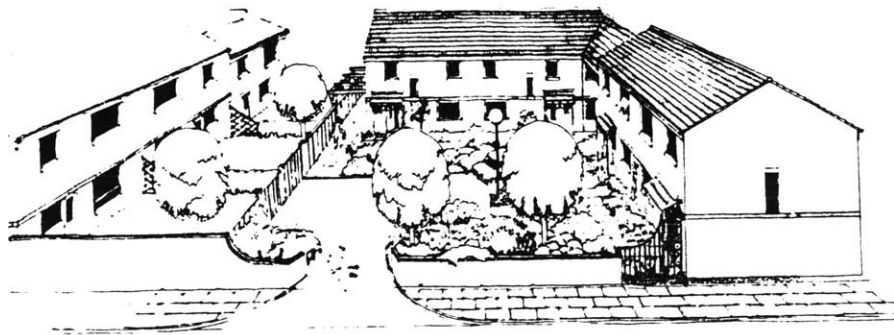


FIGURE 7  
WELLER STREETS COOPERATIVE, LIVERPOOL



**Claim: Participation Leads to Greater User Satisfaction****•The Byker Wall**

In 1968, architects Ralph Erskine, Vernon Gracie and Roger Tillotson were commissioned to do a major urban renewal of a run-down area housing approximately twelve thousand people in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England. The project, known as the Byker Wall, is considered an early experiment in the community architecture movement (although this pre-dated the coining of the term community architecture). The architects moved into a site office and set up meetings with the residents to begin the design process. To start things off, Erskine's office designed a pilot project of 46 units with extensive user participation in the process. The rest of the huge of project was designed by a process that would more accurately be called consultation, because time pressures would not allow for full participation. In 1979, sociologist Peter Malpass undertook an intensive study of Byker to refute the myths that had grown up around the project. Malpass claims that "What was built was clearly not the result of architect and client sitting down together with a blank sheet of paper."<sup>54</sup> After more than ten years the project was completed, providing housing for more than ten thousand people in twenty-four hundred dwelling units.

Ironically, the pilot scheme of 46 units, which featured the most user participation, resulted in the weakest part of the entire Byker scheme. Social historian Allison Ravetz reported that "Today Janet Square [the pilot scheme] has the ailing look of many council schemes up and down the country."<sup>55</sup> The reasons for Janet Square's failure are apparently complex, stemming mostly from its less desirable location and the disappointment of the users, whose expectations were

raised unrealistically high. The rest of the project, carried out as "collaborative design" with the users, was by contrast highly successful. Architect Vernon Gracie noted that "Surveys that have been done in Byker over the years have shown a better than 90 percent satisfaction rate with the housing and general design of the redevelopment."<sup>56</sup> In sum, it would have to be said that although the residents are highly satisfied, there is not a strong connection between satisfaction and participation.

- Black Road

In 1971, Rod Hackney bought a house on Black Road, in a low-income area of Macclesfield, in the industrial north of England. His house was part of a block of 160-year-old terrace houses that the Macclesfield Borough Council had scheduled for demolition. In 1972, the residents formed the Black Road Action Group to oppose the council plans. They enlisted the help of their resident architect, Rod Hackney, and with his assistance the Black Road residents succeeded in rehabilitating their 34 houses that comprised the project. The residents were deeply involved with the architect in the design, development, and the self-help building/managing of their homes. Hackney set up an office in a vacant corner shop and maintained a 24-hour presence on the site to allow for full user participation.

The residents of Black Road are highly satisfied with their dwellings, although this is a prime case of multiple (and therefore less clear) causation. The residents were so totally involved with the project that, for many of them, the effort consumed their lives for years. The issue of client loyalty that Woolley raised in his study is clearly at play in the residents' attitudes in this case. One cannot dismiss the importance of the alternative that faced the Black Road

community when they found out that their houses were scheduled to be bulldozed. Rather than accepting the fate of dispersal to distant housing estates, they opted to band together and fight for the renewal of their neighborhood. In the Black Road case, winning such an all consuming struggle naturally produced a very satisfied and strengthened community.

- Lewisham Self-Build

The Lewisham Borough Council undertook a bold experiment in 1976 using resident design participation and self-help workers to build 14 new low-income homes. The project employed a simple modular skeleton/panel technique developed by the architect Walter Segal. Segal's method, though unique in London, is very similar to wood-framed structures found all over North America. It requires very few skills beyond basic carpentry. One of the residents, Ken Atkins, described the process that the residents used to work with their architect:

The architect used graph paper to help us get it to represent the modular concept of 2 feet 2 inches and asking us to draw a house within cash limits. This was about 100 square meters. We did this as a group and then went to Walter Segal's house. He took all the ideas and drew up 50 to 60 different house plans, and then we went back as individual families to choose and adapt our design. . . . Every wall is non-loadbearing so it's adaptable and changeable.<sup>5 7</sup>

The houses have a distinctive style due to the construction method, but they are all different inside and out. Segal said of his system: "This is not the only way. It is merely the approach that is important. There are many other technologies and methods."<sup>5 8</sup> The Lewisham residents participated extensively in the design and building of their homes. During a recent visit to the Lewisham co-op, I asked a resident, "What is it like to live in a Walter Segal-designed house?" The response was initially a confused look, followed by an explanation that because

they had put so much of themselves into their home they did not even think of it as a "Walter Segal-designed house".<sup>59</sup> It is clear from interviews with the residents that they are very satisfied with the experience and that they are proud of their houses. Again the complexity of evaluating satisfaction arises. Many of the families came from living in high, concrete tower blocks. The opportunity to have their own detached single-family house, built to their designs was clearly a superior option, regardless of the architectural *style* of the house. Although the group was "a miscellaneous bunch of ordinary south Londoners,"<sup>60</sup> the project was clearly an extraordinary experience for them, just as it was for the borough council.

- Adelaide Road

One of the most faithful examples of N.J. Habraken's *supports and infill* theories was the Adelaide Road Estate designed by Greater London Council (GLC) architect Nabeel Hamdi in the London borough of Camden, and built in 1978. Unlike some of the other *supports* projects, Adelaide Road has a rather conventional terrace house look on the exterior. Inside however, the structure was carefully laid out on an SAR modular grid, which provided the basis for a wide variety of infill partition layouts. A group of new tenants was selected from the council waiting lists, and these residents were given the opportunity to design their own units. The residents met individually and collectively with the architect and they were given handbooks with design kits--including cut-out furniture, gridded base plans and an introductory description about how to read floor plans.

The GLC later conducted a survey of the Adelaide road project, using the standardized Department of the Environment Housing Appraisal Kit. The conclusions of the survey showed that the Adelaide Road estate received high satisfaction marks when compared to other estates of the GLC, but not

significantly higher than other estates in similar locations and conditions. The important finding was that there did not seem to be any significant difference in the level of satisfaction of the users, whether they participated in the design or not.

The GLC reported:

"This seems to imply that, if individual participation has any influence in increasing tenants satisfaction with the dwelling this has been modest."<sup>6 1</sup>

In an article evaluating the Adelaide Road project in Camden, journalist Jim Low comments:

"I am left wondering whether the scheme might still have been successful without PSSHAK [Primary Support Structures and Housing Assembly Kits] or all the tenant participation. I feel this because of the other factors that became very important when comparing Adelaide Road with other GLC housing estates. It is pleasantly and conveniently situated in Chalk Farm just up the road from the Round House and not surrounded by other council houses. Because it was a prototype the estate was obviously kept reasonably small."<sup>6 2</sup>

- Weller Streets

In 1976, residents in the Weller Streets neighborhood near Toxteth in Liverpool found out that their 120 year old terrace houses were scheduled for demolition by the city. There was a strong sense of community in the neighborhood and the residents could not accept what would have been their eventual fate--being relocated randomly in housing estates throughout Liverpool. With help from a non-profit development agency, Cooperative Development Services (CDS) the Weller Streets Cooperative was organized with the hopes of convincing the Liverpool City Council to give them the opportunity to build new houses on a site nearby. For the next three years the co-op worked through many meetings with their phenomenally dedicated architect, Bill Halsall, on site layout, exterior finishes, and interior layout

of the houses. They met collectively and individually with the architect, and expressed a surprising desire for uniformity of appearance for their houses. They felt that it was important that everything was "fair", and thus it made sense that everyone's house should look more or less the same.

One of the three co-ops that Tom Woolley studied was the Weller Streets Cooperative in Liverpool. Woolley examined user satisfaction in the project, using as his main tool, the Housing Appraisal Kit developed by the British Government's Department of the Environment. He compared these results against findings from other public housing estates of similar characteristics in the U.K.. He found, as did the researchers of the Adelaide Road case, that while a high proportion of the residents were very satisfied, they were not significantly more satisfied than non-participant residents of other good quality housing projects. In his analysis, Woolley says:

"Thus it is concluded that, while high levels of satisfaction were found. . ., it would still be difficult to argue that user participant tenants are likely to be more satisfied than other tenants." 6 3 "

In conclusion, the research undertaken thus far does not support the claim that user participation leads to greater satisfaction than nonparticipation. Still, it does lead to very high levels of satisfaction; as high as other good-quality nonparticipatory housing projects. Perhaps someday a corollary to this claim may be proven. Perhaps community architecture does lead to *fewer cases of dissatisfaction*. than conventional methods.

**Claim: User Participation is More Economical at Least in the Long-Term**

- The Byker Wall

From his experience at the Byker project, Ralph Erskine distilled an important lesson in professional commitment and financial feasibility. Although he felt the project was quite successful, he is not confident that the method is easily replicable.

"I cannot overemphasize the extraordinary dedication and persistence of Vernon [Gracie] and Roger [Tillotson] and the other members of the team over so many years. . . . If, as I am convinced, such a level of professional dedication is bound to be an exception, it would indicate that environmental quality, with the extraordinary effort it requires, can only be common if it becomes an important objective for the community at large and for its politicians and administrators. Left to individual architects good will, it will remain the occasional "one-off" phenomenon."<sup>4</sup>

The building contractors reported that there was a minor cost benefit in having the architect's office on site because it allowed them to work more closely with the architects which led to cost savings. Erskine's architectural office considered their work on the scheme overall as non-profit, since even with a small special allowance from the council, the cost for participation was not met. While the Byker project was constructed at an overall cost that was slightly less than comparable housing that had been done by the Newcastle city architects, the long-term economy of the effort is as yet unknown.

- Black Road

Black Road, like other of Rod Hackney's projects are interesting contradictions in many ways. While, on the one hand, he is adamant about the users' having nearly total control over their own design decisions, his organization exerts considerable power in the management of the process and in the financial dealings. To be sure, the Black Road venture was financially profitable for the architect, whose own house escalated in value due to the neighborhood

improvements. Without doubt, some of the user satisfaction comes from the fact that the market value for houses in the neighborhood increased from £500 to £20,000 and more!<sup>5</sup> But, Tom Woolley insists that the good financial fortune of the Black Road community was not entirely related to user involvement.

"The success of the Black Road project owed as much to ingenious financial and improvement grant arrangements that were worked out by a public health inspector from the Manchester and Salford Housing Action Group, as it did to the presence of Hackney living on site."<sup>6</sup>

Wates/Knevitt claim that the residents saved approximately 25 percent of the construction cost through their involvement in self-help efforts, which was enough to make up the difference between what they could afford and what the government subsidy covered. The Black Road project has left the residents in a much improved financial state, and construction cost subsidies for the borough council were considerably less than a traditional redevelopment of the area.<sup>7</sup>

#### •Lewisham Self-Build

The special system that Walter Segal devised, together with the use of tenant self-build, meant that the construction cost of the Lewisham houses was inexpensive by comparison to conventional housing. The pad foundations required for the unique houses were much easier and cheaper to build, particularly on the steeply sloping sites in Lewisham. Most of the residents were regularly employed, so they spent their leisure hours working with other hired workers or neighbors to put up the frames and panels that they had designed with Segal's help. It was decided that each family would be responsible for constructing or managing the construction of their own house. However, they worked cooperatively on such things as services and roads. The borough council and the families agreed to a



50/50 ownership of the completed houses, with the option for the residents of buying out the council portion of ownership' over time. The occupants' 50 percent ownership was put into the form of a mortgage, minus credits for the self-help labor invested by the resident.

Jon Broome, who was Walter Segal's assistant on the project, is cautiously optimistic about the demand for self-build: "While building a house is something that probably only a minority will want or be able to do, it does seem that there is nevertheless a hidden demand which would be satisfied if the opportunities existed and people thought that it was a real possibility."\* \*

Now eight years after the first Lewisham Co-op houses were finished, it seems that these houses are well maintained and greatly loved by the residents. Even though the standards of construction might be considered to have been lower than a concrete tower block, it is clear that these houses will be desirable places to live for a long time to come.

- Adelaide Road

This project was quite experimental for the GLC and thus the cost was slightly more than a conventional scheme. In addition, the estate was located on what must be considered a prime piece of real estate, close to the Chalk Farm tube station. The GLC found that it had suffered financial losses in other housing projects due to long vacancy periods caused when an apartment was prepared for tenants after the previous occupant had vacated. At Adelaide Road the demountable interior walls were partly intended to help the GLC reduce its remodeling costs when tenants moved. Since occupation, more than 30 percent of the tenants requested changes in the partition layouts, but it is not at all clear that

this projected savings has been realized. The Adelaide Road estate is still well maintained today, although the infill building components have had more than their share of problems. The apartments are now being offered for sale by the GLC to the tenants as condominiums as part of the Thatcher government's program to privatize public housing.

- Weller Streets

In Tom Woolley's comparison of the Weller Streets Cooperative with ten other successful housing estates, he found the construction costs to be more or less equivalent to the costs of the other estates where no user participation occurred. The co-op members stuck to a strong idea of equality and fairness, so while there are a variety of house plans, the finishes of the houses are quite standardized. Like other experimental cases, the Weller Streets received considerably more attention and management support than a normal project would have. For example, the community architect Bill Halsall worked on the project for more than 18 months without receiving any fees for his services. The generosity of some of the professionals involved in the project makes it difficult to evaluate cost effectiveness of the process. It is very doubtful that all the hours of design and consultation time were paid for. In addition, the co-op members spent many voluntary hours in meetings and committee sessions. A true accounting of the efforts versus the benefits at the Weller Streets is simply not possible.

To sum up, the evidence shows community architecture to be a more expensive method of practice in the short-term, as was expected. The longer-term benefits as well as the social costs are harder to measure. From the case studies, it would seem that the long-term economy for local authorities is undisputed, especially when the tenure structure is set up as a cooperative. While the case

studies suggest that the long-term economy of management participation is very good, there are no hard facts that prove that the economy of design participation schemes is better than good quality nonparticipatory-designed schemes. Finally it is important to note the words of warning of many community architects who insist that resident control of the housing may be the most important factor to continued success of a housing environment.

**Claim: User Participation Leads to Sociological and Psychological Benefits**

•Byker Wall

Over the years there have been maintenance problems due to construction faults in the exterior cladding and the heating system, but the level of vandalism is reported to be very low. The local officials are very happy about the small number of vandalism and management problems. The residents have taken an interest in personalizing outdoor spaces adjacent to their houses with plants and landscape elements. The Byker residents' new passion for gardening and landscaping gained them an award as "best kept village" in the *Britain in Bloom* competition in 1980.

After many delays in the process of redevelopment at Byker, a large percentage of the original residents chose, or were forced, to move away from the area before the new houses were completed. Still, a high proportion of the current residents at Byker were from the old community that existed on the site before the redevelopment. The spirit of the community is considered by the architect Vernon Gracie to have been retained and even strengthened through the long and difficult process.‘’

•Black Road

All the signs at Black Road indicate that it is a community that has been radically been transformed by the process of rebuilding itself. From a deteriorating community to a neighborhood with rising property values, the transformation has been dramatic. But there have not been any sociological surveys conducted at the project, so hard data is not available. Nick Wates claims that many formerly unemployed residents of the area now have work as a direct result of involvement in the scheme. It would be incorrect to assume that such radical change in the community is solely the result of participation in design. As described earlier, the Black Road scheme incorporated intensive community involvement with a high level of self-help labor and management. The lives of the Black Road residents became thoroughly enmeshed with the activity and economics of the project for several years.

- Lewisham Self-Build

The houses of the Lewisham Self-Build Co-op are integrated on small sites into the fabric of the south London borough of Lewisham. The houses have well-manicured lawns, and gardens and are as meticulously maintained as the other houses in this neighborhood, where property values are skyrocketing. Many of the residents claim that the experience was the most important opportunity that they have had in their lives. Their present housing situations are unquestionably more satisfactory to them than the previous slab blocks they were living in. Almost all of the residents have in some way created elements of self expression inside and outside of their homes, unmistakably symbols of their attachment and concern for the dwelling environment.

- Adelaide Road

After 10 years, the estate at Adelaide Road is still remarkably well maintained, graffiti-free, and has a strong community feel. The grassy areas are picture perfect, and the gardens in the courtyards are carefully tended by the residents. Is the concern of the residents the result of their design participation many years ago? It is not easy to answer this question accurately. When the first residents moved into Adelaide Road there was already a large percentage (20 to 50 percent) who had not even participated in the design process due to timing problems. It is possible that the process of design participation led to a stronger sense of community on the estate, even to the point where the nonparticipants were influenced. Again, however, there is no statistical evidence, only conjecture.

- Weller Streets

The new Weller Streets neighborhood is a strong and coherent community. The landscaping and site maintenance is tended to by the members of the cooperative and by a landscaping service that the cooperative has hired. While nearby neighborhoods have graffiti scrawled on the walls, the Weller Streets remains clean after 6 years of occupancy. The co-op is not without problems. There are ongoing tensions between some of the members, and there has been disappointment for some who feel unfulfilled after all the hard work. An excellent book, *The Weller Way* has been written collaboratively by the co-op members. It is a vivid documentary that gives great insight into the social and psychological interactions that this community went through.

In conclusion, the histories of these cases tell us intuitively that the experience of involvement in the design and particularly the building and maintenance of housing leads to stronger ties with the dwelling environment. The communities studied are all strong and cohesive and exhibit characteristics that

indicate positive benefits from their housing experiences. The proof of this claim has not yet been achieved empirically however due to the large number of variables that cannot be isolate in the process.

### COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE IS NOT A POLITICAL CHAMELEON

Many of the advocates of the community architecture movement claim that it is an apolitical movement. As Rod Hackney has said "It doesn't matter what political hue, community architecture can fit any political dogma."<sup>70</sup> Some of the movement's supporters even claim that this chameleon-like attribute may be community architecture's greatest strength. If we consider the general definition of the term *politics* as the balance of power between individuals or groups, then we must admit that there are very few things (if any) that are truly apolitical. This myth of the apolitics of community architecture is perhaps the most important one to question because, as can be seen from the previous chapter, the objective benefits of user participation may not be sufficiently convincing to warrant the extra effort involved, especially when thinking at the policy level. Although this thesis will *not* attempt to do an in-depth political analysis of the implications of community architecture, it is important to see that portraying community architecture as politically benign is greatly misleading.

It is obvious that the success of a movement in architecture depends on the acceptance of it by the political and financial powers of society. They are, after all, the groups that can regulate and stimulate the building industry. Therefore, as in all political strategies it is necessary to build a coalition of supportive interests. This idea of building a coalition is not new. The most pervasive architectural movement of recent history, the modern movement, was for example carefully positioned as a purely technological and purely aesthetic endeavor. In this way,

although it was revolutionary in its implications, and its promises were utopic, the originators of the movement sought to disguise it as a benign and rational approach to the problems of built form. Charles Jencks describes how the beginnings of the modern movement were set in motion by LeCorbusier and others:

"Their apolitical politics consisted in trying to do all positive things at once, without having bloodshed, class war or an erosion of freedom--an outcome which if pragmatically difficult was nonetheless desirable."<sup>1</sup>

The community architecture movement is very similarly downplaying the political ramifications and promoting itself as a near-panacea. As Tom Woolley points out "Words like *community* and *participation* are ideologically loaded, which according to some, are distorted to mask *cleavages of interest and inequalities*."<sup>2</sup> Certainly the issues of politics and political economy are not unknown to those who promote community architecture, but too often they are trivialized. The community architecture movement was inspired by thinkers like John F.C. Turner and Colin Ward who were very clear about the political implications. Turner wrote in *Housing by People*:

"The central issue raised in this book is that of *who decides?* Who decides, and who provides what for whom is clearly the political issue of power and authority."<sup>3</sup>

And as Colin Ward wrote in his book *Tenants Take Over* about the very much related subject of tenants taking control of public housing estates:

"It would be foolish to suggest that it is not a political matter. It is political in the most profound sense; it is about the distribution of power in society. But fortunately it is one of those issues which cuts across normal party divisions. It finds supporters amongst adherents of all political parties, and none."<sup>4</sup>

Community architecture finds adherents in all political parties because it

promises certain things (*i.e.* working class support, greater long-term economy, increased construction activity, etc.) to those political parties, but it also finds opposition in political parties because it represents a challenge to the status quo in all political parties. Nick Wates/Charles Knevitt point out that community architecture is based on an alternative to orthodox party politics, that is, it is based on the notion of a *participatory* democracy rather than a *representative* democracy. Wates and Knevitt quote Thomas Jefferson, the founding father of modern democracy, in their book about community architecture.

"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society, but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform them of their discretion."<sup>7 5</sup>

But participatory democracy has traditionally been somewhat cumbersome and is more sensitive to public opinion, and therefore more unpredictable, than representative democracy, and thus has been eliminated in all but the smallest of social groupings. A participatory democracy is, of course, closely related to many notions of anarchism, which provided the foundations for the thoughts of Ward, Turner, DeCarlo, *et. al.* The elements of participatory democracy, whether in housing politics, development politics, or any other political realm thus represent a threat to the entrenched representative democracies that exist in most western countries.

The reality is that community architecture is not only profoundly political as Colin Ward rightly implies, but it also suggests profound economic changes. Many community architects and researchers warn that the positive benefits of participatory design are probably minimal when compared to the more politically and economically hot issues of resident management, ownership, or control of the



housing. One of Tom Woolley's general conclusions from his research emphasizes this strongly.

"The case for user participation in design, . . . is, therefore, not a strong one. It is conceivable that many of the benefits of user control, management, education and inter-action identified in this study, could have been achieved in other ways without participation in design. Participation in design was not necessarily a guarantee that users' ideas and needs could be fully met."<sup>76</sup>

Community architecture, if it is to be used to help low-income people to gain better housing situations, can not perform economic miracles, especially if it is more costly to work that way in the short-term. Even successful self-help efforts have not been completely unsupported endeavors. In capitalist economies, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the invisible hand of the market is not able to take care of a significant portion of the housing need. Without the financial support of social housing policies, those low-income families will be forced into unsatisfactory housing situations or homelessness. Thus, for community architecture (or any other method) to succeed in improving the housing situation for poor people, there must be economic assistance allocated to create housing opportunities in increasingly hostile urban housing markets.

There is an urgent need to do further research on the economics and politics of the community architecture approach. Balancing interests of government, industry, finance, along with those of the user are unquestionably important policy issues. If community architecture is to provide solutions for the housing crisis in England or anywhere else, then it must gather a coalition of political and economical support for the ideas of participatory democracy.

## COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE IN THE UNITED STATES CONTEXT

The community development movement that evolved in many urban centers in the United States is like a cousin to the British community architecture movement. In contrast to the experience in the United Kingdom, the majority of low-income people in the United States lived (and do live) in privately owned rental housing. In the United Kingdom private rental housing for low-income families is relatively scarce. Almost one third of the housing is publicly owned, and most low-income families live in public housing. Thus the British community architects are facing the challenge of rehabilitating or replacing their deteriorating public housing, while in the United States, the community development movement has had as its primary task the preservation and replacement of abandoned and deteriorating private rental stock.

Because of this difference, it is more difficult in the U.S. to identify and organize the low-income families who are scattered in private housing and who spend many years on the long waiting lists for publicly subsidized housing. They cannot be the future clients of community architects if they cannot be found. In the United Kingdom, the community architecture movement has largely involved existing *in situ* council tenants, whose housing has become uninhabitable and must be replaced or rehabilitated.

If design participation is to come to the U.S. the way it is happening in the U.K. there must be systems developed to identify and involve the future residents as the architects clients. In many U.S. cities, there is such a shortage of housing, and the waiting lists are so long that when tenants come to the top of the list, they cannot or will not wait the many months or sometimes years that it may take to build them a house. In the short-term, they would prefer to move immediately into

a reasonable standardized apartment than to have to wait while the house they helped design is built.

Some community development corporations have built up the capacity to do their own architectural design, usually as a result of scaling up their operations from small scale repairs and moderate rehabilitations of existing structures. But most CDCs have instead relied on outside for-profit architecture firms. Even when a CDC does have its own design staff, unless the users are identified beforehand, participatory design cannot occur. Because of this difficulty, most of the end users of housing developed by CDCs have not had the opportunity to participate directly in the design of the housing.

A related and very important difference exists between the organizational interests of community development corporations versus community architecture. In the U.K. community architecture has been used as a mechanism by a neighborhood group to get what it wants for its own needs. Similarly, most CDCs were originally set up to stabilize neighborhoods facing urban renewal; and fought to preserve the neighborhood for the residents (usually homeowners) in the community. Rather than working in a transitory way with a client group, CDCs became established as institutions in the community. Once a neighborhood is saved, however, and reinvestment takes place, the idealistic and humanitarian notions of CDCs that compel them to fight for low-income housing development often generate conflict in the newly stabilized community. Since most property owners behave according to the rationale of free market pressures, they often prefer having speculators come into the neighborhood to drive their home values up higher. Since most property owners behave according to the rationale of free market pressures, they often prefer having speculators come into the neighborhood

to drive their home values up higher. The Boston based CDC, Urban Edge Housing Corporation, has been working in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood for more than 13 years. Journalist Christina Robb explains the turnaround that Urban Edge has faced.

Thanks in part to Urban Edge, the people who want to stay in the neighborhood no longer have to worry that they will be forced out because the area is too isolated and dangerous, and worth so little that banks won't lend money on it. Now they have to worry that they'll be forced out because it's too attractive and expensive.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, many CDCs are now struggling to provide low-income housing for people who would like to be the future residents of a neighborhood, or for those who will be pushed out of the neighborhood by escalating property values. CDCs often face drastically different motives within their constituency because most communities are *non-homogeneous*.

It is ironic that the faction that typically has the most political power in urban communities are the homeowners who are now fighting the CDCs that initially saved the neighborhoods from arson and destruction. As a result, the participatory design game is often turned upside down by the presence of zoning reviews and "enlightened" citizen participation meetings. Those citizens who most often vocally participate in the decisions about new low-income housing developments are the neighboring homeowners. Thus the future schemes are affected, not by the ones who will live in the housing, but in fact by those who are opposed to the idea in the first place.

From this somewhat cynical view of the problems of CDCs, it makes sense that user participation in design is much more important in community architecture (U.K.) than in community development (U.S.) because in community

architecture the clients are real people, while in community development the clients are abstract future demands. Admittedly some CDCs maintain strong support from their communities which are dedicated to providing open housing and well integrated environments. Nevertheless, this abstraction of the client needs can result in a crisis of interests in CDCs as they mature. There is much debate about the dual role that CDCs are trying to play: community organizing and advocacy versus production of housing. As CDCs become more established and entrenched in the institutions that support them they often become less responsive to the needs of the community in which they were founded. On the other hand, it is impossible for a CDC to produce housing unless it builds its capacity and grows into a stable institution.

In summary, if the benefits (both proven and implied) of community architecture are to be implemented in the United States, there must be a way for architects and developers to identify a community of need to work with. There must be mechanisms set up to allow design and development professionals to join in with current and future users to take on the challenge of environmental needs as a real crusade rather than an abstraction of statistical demand. This is the radically different lesson that community architecture is teaching to professionals, and this is the source of its energy.

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