

Conventional Complacency in British Housing

The Explanations Behind Britain's Community
Self-Build Absence in Comparison to the
Netherlands

self-build
community
unconventional
political
architecture

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Can self-build projects truly become the new “common” within British housing? Self-build schemes can be vital in understanding issues within architecture. However, in 21st century Britain, housing has become an economic system rather than fulfilling dwellings for users, raising concerns about power distribution. Architecture shapes society’s culture and Britain has revealed architectural limits with conventional clichés, disregarding the political, social and environmental impacts. Standard, identical building blocks can often create alienation within architecture between the building and the dweller. A reverse of the architect’s role to a facilitator could create contextually relevant dwellings, as this would cater for individual sensitivity. This is active within self-build methods, which seems simple as a concept. However, self-build is not the standardised way of living compared to Britain’s neighbouring countries, such as the Netherlands. This paper aimed to discover reasons for the absence of self-build in Britain in comparison to the Netherlands, as this method can be an agency to solving political, social and environmental issues. This paper concludes this research question by interviewing British and Dutch experts within the field of self-build. This shone a light on the absence of self-build in Britain against the existing literature data, showing the benefits and drawbacks when implementing these schemes in Britain. This paper revealed the notion of value within British housing.

WHAT IS SELF-BUILD?

According to the National Custom and Self-Build Association (NaCSBA) and the self-build housing sector, community self-build methods are potential solutions to prevailing social, environmental, and political problems within housing (NACSBA, 2021). Morton's definition of self-build is where an individual or a community have serious input into the design and construction of a home (Morton, 2013, 8). Not to be thrown off by the luxurious schemes seen on *Grand Designs*, Barlow describes self-build methods as "simple and collaborative", where the participation of the occupants is largely encouraged in the physical construction process or the construction arrangements of their home (Barlow et al, 2001). Hopkins describes this as an "umbrella term" for many schemes: community self-build, co-housing and housing co-operatives (Hopkins, 2021). Wainwright states this has been proven to be admired globally (Wainwright, 2016), but the question is whether these schemes are as "simple" as they are advertised?

Self-build is important because providing people with alternative dwellings to standardised blocks can offer flexibility for all societal groups through its community enhancing advantages (Morton, 2013, 4-5). Morton, Head of House Planning in Britain, believes our housing system is "broken", but communities could form strong connections with self-built dwellings (Ibid). By changing the role of the

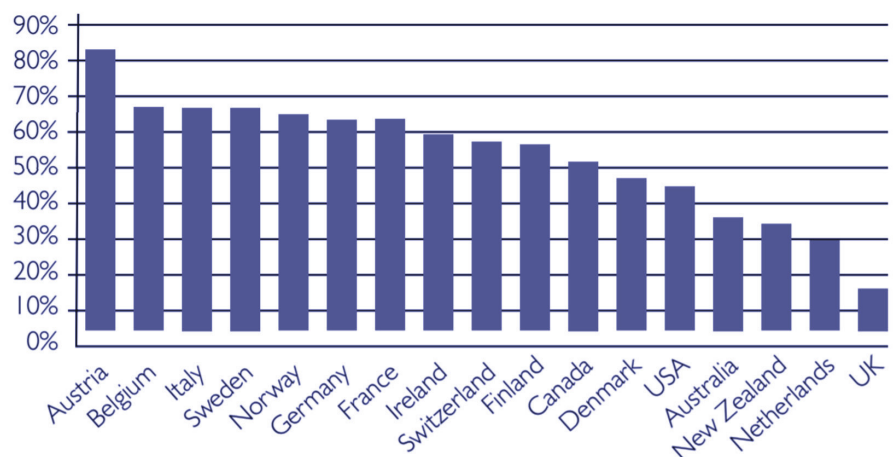
architect, this realignment of the relationship between residents and the houses they occupy contributes to responsive housing (Holland, 2017, 104). Bossuyt suggests this method highlights the social issues prevailing from the housing crisis: ownership, affordability and sustainability (Bossuyt et al., 2018, 525). Self-build stems from the use of locally sourced materials. This is not only environmentally sustainable, but it also tends to be "cheap to build", explained by a straw-based architectural firm called Straw Works (Smith, 2021).

Despite the "simple" and appealing description of self-build from article writers, it has not been significantly implemented in Britain since its conception in comparison to other neighbouring countries. Community self-build is high up on Britons' aspirations list, though Ipsos MORI says that it has failed to develop into a conventional housing solution in Britain (Ipsos MORI, 2014). Morton shows that the percentage of self-build in the UK had only risen to 10 per cent in 2013, whilst Europe's

percentage is now over 50 per cent (Morton, 2013, 8). Fig. 1 shows the UK as the lowest achieving self-build territory in 2011 (HM Government, 2011).

Faced with bureaucratic hurdles and unavailability of land, many self-build schemes in Britain are left abandoned (Collinson, 2011).

This paper explores why community self-build schemes are currently disregarded in Britain. The literature research, based on anarchist literature, official bodies, online newspapers, authors of self-build articles and existing self-build schemes, outlines the advantages and constraints that make self-build less relevant within our society today. Historical literature informed the contextual and political relevance of the self-build method. The second section of this paper will analyse primary data against secondary data, exploring social relations and constraints within the public and the investors. This will illuminate gaps within existing knowledge and experiences to reach conclusions on the lack of self-build. By researching



Source: NaCSBA

Fig. 1- Illustration taken from HM Government report 'Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England' by NaCSBA



Fig. 2- Segal being the 'facilitator' on site of Walter's Way. Photography by Phil Sayer, 1987



Fig. 3. Contemporary example of the Segal construction method in use. Photography by Cay Green

practices and individuals within the Netherlands, this investigation will help ascertain why Britain is unable to implement self-build as efficiently.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SELF-BUILD LITERATURE- WALTER SEGAL'S ROLE AS FACILITATOR

The first, well-known paradigm of collaborative architecture in Britain came from the architect Walter Segal. Segal set out to provide a new paradigm of architecture when he moved to London in 1930 from the Netherlands (Shaw, 2016). He aimed to promote a different concept of building social dwellings, but as anarchist Colin Ward describes, it always should have been "the normal way and not the remarkable expectation" (Ward,

1990, 122).

Segal housed 14 people who had been on the waiting list for council housing in Lewisham (Broome, 1986), hoping to help those affected by the privatisation of social housing. With Lewisham Council's approval, the encouragement of freedom and community enabled all 14 dwellers to build and retain their own affordable home on Walter's Way in 1978 (Ibid). Segal wanted to invent an architectural system where communities can physically engage by allowing freedom with the layout of their house and the liberty to build with neighbours (Kołakowski, 2020), whilst reducing the role of the architect to merely a facilitator or engineer, as shown in Fig. 2.

To empower the residents, Segal gave the neighbours a standardised modular model after deciding their personal

layout, involving timber post-beam systems (Broome, 1986). In these documents, Segal provided the neighbours with building instructions (Ibid). Anyone could easily purchase off-the-shelf materials, such as softwood (Ibid), therefore making it readily available. The post-beam construction system accommodated easy modifications, facilitating any developing lifestyle changes (Marriott, 2016, 20).

Kołakowski describes the building process like an "IKEA system", so that everyone can become involved (Kołakowski, 2020). Crouch portrays Segal's idea as "building community cohesion" (Crouch, 2017), as the neighbours also built relationships through collaborative construction (Wallace et al, 2013). This was achieved through crossed frames with rigid joints that were constructed flat on the

ground before being raised up into place in collaboration with neighbours, shown in Fig. 3.

Holland says this control by the dweller helps define and create communities within neighbourhoods, which is a positive attribute that would not have been established through traditional construction procurement (Holland, 2017). Marriott believed that this created contextually and socially relevant housing for each dweller (Marriott, 2016, 20).

Segal set out to destroy the “alienation within architecture” (Ward, 1990, 11) which occurs between architects, dwellers and the building. Ward believes that there should be meaningful connections between housing and the dwellers, creating a feeling of “dweller control” (Ibid). Narrowing the architect’s power down to an “enabler”, as Bono describes it, helps to satisfy the client (Bono, 2019). Samuel argues against this, claiming architects can bring a project on time and within a budget (Samuel, 2018). However, Holland suggests in *Wild Architecture* that the ambitions of architects often conflict with the tastes and lifestyles of clients (Holland, 2017, 104).

Coates believes removing the traditional architect-client relationship would create better social housing for people, rather than the social housing of people (Coates, 2015, 16-20). Kołakowski summarised the Segal system as a process which proved that “architecture can contribute to satisfying the human need for cooperation

and creation” (Kołakowski, 2004).

Enthusiasts of Walter Segal-Participation

Colin Ward was an architect and a well-known figure of the UK anarchist movement, particularly on issues of housing and planning (Spatial Agency, 2021). His political philosophy rejected dominant power structures where “one group of people make decisions, exercise control, and limits choices” (Ward, 1996). He admired Segal, viewing his self-building system as exemplary of such an approach to housing, promoting participation and “dweller control” (Ward, 1990, 11). Segal set out a solution for freedom in Britain’s social housing planning in the 1970s, influencing Ward’s concerns with the people and their right to freedom (Grahame, 2015). Segal generated participation through architecture to ultimately end the ‘one-size-fits-all’ position that has caused many contextually irrelevant buildings.

Segal had many admirers. As Broome mentions, Lewisham Council allowed Segal to accomplish his self-build system (Broome, 1986), which demonstrates that people believed that his housing strategies could work. Architecture firms were also inspired by him. For example, Architype produced Britain’s Diggers and Hedgehog self-build scheme using simple timber frame methods initiated by Segal (Architype, 2021). Overall, Segal’s method became a blueprint for many community-led housing

schemes, with benefits such as dweller control, sustainability and community cohesion, forming part of the earliest low-cost self-build projects in Britain (Hughes, 2004).

British Projects Supporting Initiative – LILAC’s Sustainable Co-housing

The cooperative lifestyle originated in Denmark and spread throughout Europe in the 1970s (Cummings & Kropf, 2020). The Low Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) in Leeds was inspired by the Homeruskwartier’s model in Almere (Feary, 2015). Straw-bale, solar panels, community shared gardens and communal houses produced three benefits to this scheme (Downer, 2014): low impact, affordability and community (Chatterton, 2013, 4). Founder Paul Chatterton said straw-bale is available in abundance in Britain, allowing them to complete a quick, affordable building (Chatterton, 2014). It offers efficient insulation U-Values, which are effectively below the maximum building regulation requirements (Style, 2014). Straw-bale allowed a hands-on approach with the community, encouraging social interaction (Chatterton, 2014).

Self-Build Constraints-Governmental Guidelines

Despite the benefits, obstacles restricting the self-build movement can be ascertained from national trends, statistics and governmental guidelines.

Even though Lewisham Council accepted Segal’s scheme, other local councils

remain averse to change. Morton explains how councils avoid allocating land for self-builders and oppose any unconventional proposals brought by the local residents (Morton, 2013, 6). Freedom, in terms of housing, is often restricted by governing bodies who do not wish to deviate from the conventional planning system (Holland, 2017, 108).

Kieran Toms suggested that Britain’s planning system needs to change, as he believes it should be easier to self-build (Toms, 2018). However, Grant Schapps, England’s Secretary of State, declared Homeruskwartier as a workable model, seeing a marked difference when councils offered help to aspiring self-builders (GOV.UK, 2013). Schapps dedicated a £30 million fund to self-builders, however Brenton explains that this is insufficient (Brenton, 2021).

Conversely, Dutch policymakers considered it appropriate to revive traditional self-build in the Netherlands, therefore the 2001 Dutch National Housing Report provided a political impetus for self-build. This stated that one-third of Dutch housing should be self-built by 2040, increasing the demand for self-build schemes (Ministry of Housing et al., 2006).

Lack of Land in Britain for Self-Builders

A study, carried out by the University of York, found stastical data on the different types of land obtained by self-builders in Britain and the difficulties inherent in the

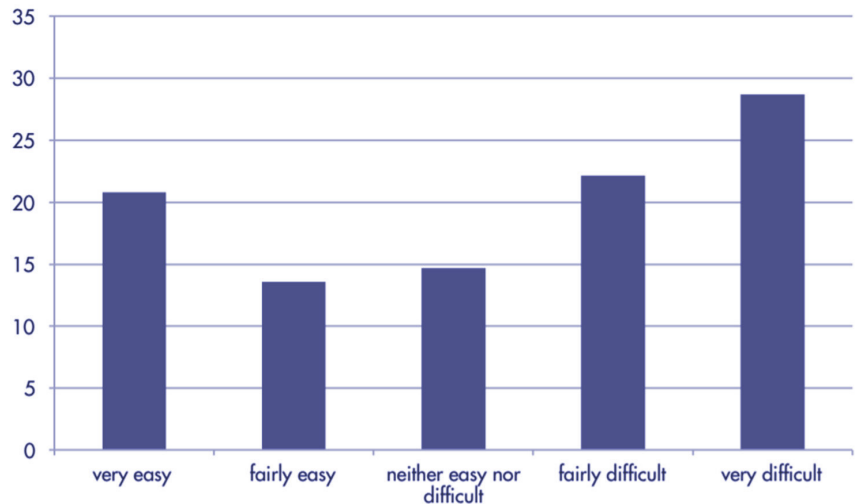


Fig. 4- Survey of the types of plots. Graph by Alison Wallace et al, 2013

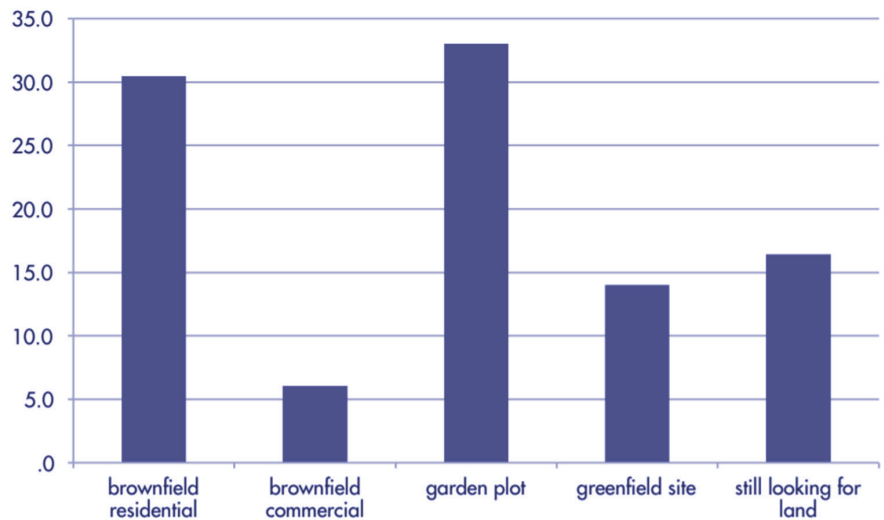


Fig. 5- Survey of difficulties obtaining land in the UK. Graph by Alison Wallace et al, 2013



Fig. 6- What makes up the cost of a new £220,000 home? Graph from Alex Morton, 2013

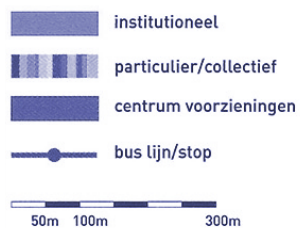


Fig. 7- The official masterplan of Homeruskwartier, the city of Almere, Jacqueline Tellinga, Art Zaaijer 2006



Fig. 8- Homerus quarter: self-build on a revolutionary scale. Photography by Adrienne Norman, 2019

process of finding this land (Wallace et al., 2013). Fig. 4 is taken from their study, which illustrates that over 15% of self-builders were still looking for land in 2013, supporting NaCBSA's argument regarding the unavailability of land in Britain (NaCBSA, 2021).

Fig. 5 also shows that the majority of the survey group found it 'very difficult' to obtain land (Wallace et al., 2013).

Another study by Morton shows the costs of obtaining land are on par with building the home in Fig. 6, which further illustrates the difficulties (Morton, 2013, 16). Slower development on allocated sites results in difficult distribution of further sites. Even once the land is allocated, councils can slow development or block planning applications (Ibid, 18).

Contrastingly, municipalities in the Netherlands possess little to no land. With this lack of availability of land, it is difficult for politicians to justify

allocating plots specifically for self-build schemes (Tellinga, 2021). Facing similar impediments to Britain, this raises the question why there is little self-build in Britain?

Homeruskwartier- the Affordable Self-Build Model in Almere, the Netherlands

The analysis between the Netherlands and Britain has been chosen because the Dutch are not too far ahead with the self-build movement, explained in figure 1, but ahead enough to see a difference. Therefore, analysis and conclusions can be closely refined, as there would be similarities and differences within experiences. Europe, in comparison to Britain, has adopted more self-build schemes. In Britain, more than 80% of housing is built by the same large developers, consolidating a monopoly over the housing market (Hamiduddin et al., 2016, 1). In the Netherlands, three in ten houses are self-

built, compared to Britain's one in ten (Collinson, 2011). Bossuyt explains that more Dutch citizens want to contribute to their urban environment (Bossuyt et al., 2018). The analysis between the Netherlands and Britain has been chosen is because the Dutch are not too much ahead in terms of self-build, but enough to see a difference. Therefore, analysis and conclusions can be closely refined, where there would be similarities and differences.

Homeruskwartier began before peak of the 2008 financial crisis. (Feary, 2015). Interestingly, the plan predates the financial crisis so during the crisis, which no one could have predicted, the self-builders continued to build, while the developers stopped building (Tellinga, 2021). The financial crisis had profound effects on the Dutch property development industry, however NaCSBA explains that self-build proved to be less vulnerable to its effects (NaCSBA, 2021). Homeruskwartier targeted affordable housing for low-income households of €20,000 (£14,500) a year, because of the cost savings of self-build compared with conventional dwellings (Lloyd et al., 2012, 24). Therefore in 2007, the smallest 86 m2 plot cost around £25,000 whilst a 1000m2 plot cost £290,000 (NaCSBA, 2021). Tellinga explains the reason why self-building was so successful during the financial crisis was because a single home could be built based on the income of one household (Tellinga, 2021). Contrastingly, developers needed at least

70% presale and a loan from the bank (Ibid). The inclusivity of plots can be seen in (Fig. 7).

Homeruskwartier celebrates individual desire: you decide how to behave and how to use your space, which is shaped to your own liking (Oosterwold, 2021). This resolves Ward's criticism of "alienation with architecture" within the housing system, where the power of the architect often conflicts with individuality (Ward, 1990, 11), therefore creating variety within housing, seen in (Fig. 8).

Homeruskwartier established a strong blueprint for residential innovation (Russell, 2002), providing a source of inspiration for projects like LILAC Grove in Leeds (Feary, 2015) and OWCH in London (Brenton, 2021). Many community-led schemes in the Netherlands influenced alternative ways of living in Britain because of their unconventional benefits. For example, Maria Brenton presented the concept of senior cohousing, as developed in the Netherlands, to an audience of older women in London (Brenton, 2021). This presentation generated long lasting success, as in 2016 it resulted in the Older Women Co Housing (Ibid).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is set out to illuminate existing research and discover the benefits and obstacles to self-build schemes through primary data to draw current conclusions. There were existing articles based on the benefits to these schemes, however the literature did not provide answers to whether these obstacles

truly prevent self-build from becoming the new "common" in British housing. Carrying out qualitative, semi-structured interviews with housing developers and individuals, who have been actively involved in community self-build projects, enabled rich and relevant primary data. Qualitative analysis was important in linking individual experiences with an understanding of the social, economic, and political processes (Knigge and Cope, 2006, 2022).

A purposeful sampling strategy of interviewees was carried out to ensure diverse viewpoints. These individuals were approached separately through their email addresses.

This selection included:

- A Housing Developer, based in London
- Director of the Greater Manchester Community Led Housing Hub
- A project manager of Homeruskwartier, based in the Netherlands
- The Leader of the Abundant Earth Community, promoting self-build in Lincoln
- Director of an architecture firm specialising in strawbale self-build, based in Britain – anonymised to "Smith"
- Secretary at Yorspace, based in York
- Project consultant for Older Women Co-housing (OWCH), based in North London
- Director of HugnHomes, based in Cumbria

A Dutch perspective was obtained to draw comparisons with the Netherlands. They were approached by email, which was translated into Dutch. This method generated

insights and reflections that align or contrast with Britain.

Interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom and Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19. In-depth interviews lasted 11-50 minutes, where they reflected on personal experiences with self-build and community integrated projects. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on the positives and negatives of self-build schemes or, for housing developers, reasons for the lack of implementation of these schemes.

Grounded Theory

In this paper, grounded theory was used to codify the procedures for qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This was useful to compare key consistencies and irregularities between the Netherlands and Britain (Knigge and Cope, 2006, 2024). Thematic context analysis was conducted through coding these interviews (Assarroudi et al., 2018) to determine word patterns for substantial amounts of textual data and identify common themes in the materials (Canary, 2019). This was categorised into obstructions and experiences within the subject of community self-build. This approach was chosen as there was no available theory to explain the lack of self-build in Britain, therefore investigating and understanding the experiences and mechanisms that obstruct the movement will help propose comparative answers. This enables a more extensive idea of whether self-build could potentially become the new common in Britain,

Person	Response	Word Coding	Theme
Higginson	"During the 2007 financial problems, small regional builders were wiped out from the market by dominant housing developers. Those small, local builders never came back to the market. There is a demand for self-build, but there is a difference between walking around an exhibition and buying a plot of land. There is a big drop-out rate because people cannot find plots"	Financial crisis, market, domination, housing developers, difficult	Land
Chandler	"The cost of land in this country prioritises the delivery of housings on brownfield sites, which come with complications. Housing associations have a lot of small, difficult infill sites. At the same time, they are attractive to us because we own them and London is incredibly expensive. If you can generate enough housing on that land, it is good proposition"	Expensive, difficult, brownfield sites	Land
Tellinga	"When the financial crisis ended, it became more interesting for housing developers to enter that market again...the Netherlands and the UK do not put the market out to individuals. It is not in the developer's interest to have self-builders within their scheme: they do not earn anything from it"	Financial crisis, housing developers, difficult, market	Land

Fig. 9- Theme of land. By Author, 2021

and if not, what it is that is obstructing the movement.

Limitations and Obstacles

The first obstacle was accessing primary data. The aim was to analyse existing literature in conjunction with the primary data to explore the obstacles in further detail. This was overcome by asking the first set of interviewees if they knew individuals in the field who would be willing to participate. This approach increased active participants from two to eight. The lack of response from selected councils: Lincoln, Warrington and Lewisham limited the scope of the data.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were informed of the motivation behind the interviews. All participants signed a research consent form, which contained the option to request data removal. All

participants accepted the use of their information and opinions to spread the word of unconventional living.

FINDINGS

Theme 1 - Lack of Land

All eight participants stated their difficulties obtaining plots of land when they were asked about the obstacles of self-build. They all agreed that housing developers dominate the British housing market. Higginson sells plots of land to self-builders in Britain, because self-builders struggled to re-enter the housing market after the financial crisis of 2008 (Higginson, 2021). London housing developer Chandler confirmed Higginson's point when asked about the problems that come with self-build. He believes the "availability of land is challenging" (Chandler, 2021).

This correlated with the

views from the director of a strawbale architecture firm, who specialises in sustainable self-build. Smith believes that in the English system:

"only the wealthy can obtain land on their own because the politics around land in the UK is excluding...if you are not wealthy then that is your own fault" (Smith, 2021).

She summarised this issue as "ridiculous" and the "absolute biggest reason why we do not have self-build" (Ibid). She has experience with clients who have been waiting for land for 5 years (Ibid).

However, Jacqueline Tellinga, urban planner and project manager of Homeruskwartier in the Netherlands, explained that Dutch municipalities also had difficulties finding plots of land, meaning few schemes were implemented after Homeruskwartier. She described the "oligopoly process of real

Person	Response	Word coding	Theme
Peaceful Warrior	"Working with people is not the easiest thing in the world, not everyone is going to see it progressing in the same way and speed"	Hard, people, work, disagreement	People
Higginson	"Finally, there are those at the end of the spectrum 'who are scared stiff by programmes like Grand Designs'. These people have watched Grand Designs and want to build their own house. They think it is a great idea, but they watch Grand Designs but see that it goes wrong. They want to do it but are scared...when we have someone who wants to buy a plot from us but is scared of what to do, we can put a comfort blanket around them and deliver the project for them. From their point of view they get to drink champagne and tell their friends how they have built their own house, whereas in reality we have done it for them"	Grand Designs, scared, comforting, people, ambitions	People
Brenton	"The group went on all sorts of weekend trips, cycling along canals, theatre visits. They got to know each other really well before becoming a co-housing group of 45"	Bonding, community, people, relationships, success	People
Chandler	"Only one family lasted the course because they had all fallen away and they had not appreciated the efforts that would be required to get it up and running. They did not have the camaraderie that my group had. There were tough times, long and cold winter nights. Our group had bonded, so they carried on. I would never advertise for random families"	Hard work, bonding, broken, community, group, relationships, tough	People

Fig. 10- Theme of people. By Author, 2021

Person	Response	Word coding	Theme
Gibbard	"We have existed for 7 years and have only just completed the stages of negotiation with the council. All that is left to do is raise the last bit of money that we need in order to build the houses"	Time, difficult, process	Time
Chandler	"The time it took to complete was three or four times more than what we had allowed. The problem was through the funding requirements with regulators and if we do not meet these deadlines, we will lose our funding. They were miles off finishing so we had to get builders in to help them finish"	Time, difficult, help	Time

Fig. 11- Theme of time. By Author, 2021

estate companies who have access to land unequally pushing self-builders behind" (Tellinga, 2021). However, in the Homeruskwartier project, she ensured small plots of land were available and affordable for the low income sector (Ibid). Tellinga compared this to Britain, where schemes are "aimed at middle to high-income people" (Tellinga,

2021).

Chandler helped develop a self-build project in 2010 with one of his old residents "who lived in over-crowded accommodation" (Chandler, 2021). Chandler was questioned as to why his company had not implemented self-build schemes since 2010. He explained since 2010, the company was never

approached regarding self-build and their priorities as a housing association are "to house people in need quickly, as they do not want to be given a piece of land and told to build their house themselves" (Ibid). As the company's assets, the houses are at a greater risk with self-build schemes as they could be built to a poorer quality, thus reducing their value (Ibid).

Brenton, founder of the OWCH co-housing project, went through eight different housing associations. The association that fulfilled the project never came to its opening and have not been involved in unconventional projects since (Brenton, 2021). Brenton highlighted the "lack of interest" as a whole from housing developers, who are the ones that dominate and influence the housing market (Ibid). Gibbard emphasised this with her struggle in finding a plot of land for Yorspace, as they were set on a space which the council "ultimately sold it to the highest bidder" (Gibbard, 2021).

Hopkins emphasised that the absence of self-build goes beyond the unavailability of land (Hopkins, 2021). He believes the availability of "land is individual to every region of the country" and says "land is not the issue: it is about motivation" (Hopkins, 2021). Gibbard, secretary of the YorSpace in York, echoes this sentiment. She describes the process of finding land full of "torture, twists and turns", clarifying that "Yorkshire is booming with alternative ways of living" so she is "hopeful"

about their future (Gibbard, 2021). These results show that the lack of self-build is deeper-rooted than the unavailability of land.

Theme 2 - The People

Hopkins' reference to a lack of "motivation" introduced the second theme behind the lack of self-build in Britain, reflected in the results. When asked about the difficulties of self-build schemes, six out of eight interviewees referenced the dwellers when it comes to motivation, relationships and skill set. Tellinga says how we pick our own food, so why not make our own decision from scratch when it comes to housing (Tellinga, 2021).

Hopkins, director of Greater Manchester Community Housing Hub, emphasised the long-term responsibilities that accompany self-build, highlighting that "sometimes the people do not have motivation to maintain them", which fails to nurture longevity (Hopkins, 2021). This aligned with self-build advocate Guilhem Dumas (Peaceful Warrior), as his then 'Abundant Earth Community' ended due to its members not being able to fully pledge their time because of other life commitments (Dumas, 2021). He also considered self-build schemes to have a perception as "overwhelming" (Ibid). However, he has not given up on the idea and explained that he has plans to move to a European country to start a new unconventional housing project (Ibid). Higginson has also experienced clients' perceptions of self-build as overwhelming, as they lack

construction skills and are "scared stiff by programmes like Grand Designs" that portray self-build as complicated and expensive (Higginson, 2021). Higginson's company sometimes offers a "comfort blanket" to inexperienced, nervous clients by delivering the construction for them (Ibid). Gibbard also has experience with people believing that these schemes are "too hard" and not wanting to support them (Gibbard, 2021). She revealed how people refrain from asking about their financial projections, which shows how Yospace is going to be affordable in the long term. Instead, they receive criticism where they

are referred to as "hippies" and "moochers" (Ibid).

However, some self-build projects have established success due to strong connections and commitments between the dwellers. Brenton found that the OWCH project was a success because their group had bonded over weekend trips before initiating the building process (Brenton, 2021). Chandler emphasised on the importance of having "ready-made groups" (Chandler, 2021). He had known of previous self-build projects that were implemented by other housing associations where the residents did not have close relationships and fell

Person	Response	Word coding	Theme
Tellinga	"It is merely up to the local governments to perform. They tried and were willing to help here. Not all of them do this. It depends on the council. Without the explicit support of the city council, a scheme like this would never happen"	Government, council, help, variation	Council
Brenton	"We are a self-satisfied, post-imperial basket case. You can find really good local authorities and really bad ones. They are variable and pretty impervious whether they are bad or good. In the name of so called "freedom" of action, we do not get a say. Local authorities are pretty ossified on the whole and it is very difficult for an ordinary person to penetrate them, unless you know them"	Self-satisfied, local authorities, bad, good, variable, ossified, stubborn	Council
Gibbard	"There was some push back in terms of planning permission because we are doing something that is untested in this council. We approach this by trying to get them excited about being the first early adopter and leader of these schemes"	Planning permission, hindering, council	Council
Smith	"The Welsh and Scottish Government promote self-build much more than the English Government. I tell my clients to move over there because they will have an easier time with it. I have 6 project going on over there at the moment as they manage to get planning permission"	Hard, English, Welsh, Scottish, government, planning permission,	Council
Brenton	"What the UK Government is trying to do at the moment is regulate planning abysmally; the local people will not be able to stop developments plastering identical boxes. In the Netherlands they introduced a piece of legislation around 2005 which made provincial funding available to small builders and groups. This was to challenge the uniformity and self-builders could get funds. What is to stop us doing that in the UK? But, we have to build orthodoxes"	Abysmally, identical, orthodox, lack of control, government, legislation	Council
Peaceful Warrior	"The difficulties come with the council. I think they are naive and have backward thinking. We are boiled down to adhering to the building codes and planning permissions, which are completely disproportional in relevance to safety. It cost someone £600 for a tree survey. I am very disappointed that the council did not take on some of the enthusiasm that I had with developing community planning. That was the biggest stumbling block with my project"	Difficulties, council, naive, backwards, planning permission, disproportionate,	Council

Fig. 12- Theme of councils. By Author, 2021

Person	Response	Word coding	Theme
Brenton	"I think the deepest level is cultural problems. It is so different from the Netherlands, there is so much variety. I have never been able to put my finger on it. The Netherlands are more democratic; they like to be involved. A girl who moved over from there to the UK was named the most impertinent girl in the school because she would always ask questions. Our culture could not tolerate it, whereas in other cultures, children are consulted and encouraged to share responsibility. In our culture that's sheer impertinence"	Variety, culture, responsibility,	Culture
Peaceful Warrior	"I have lived in Spain for several years and the way of community there is so different to the UK. They will have a community hub under where you physically live, so community is brought right to where you live. In the UK, we do not have integrated design in terms of where you live is where you associate community"	Different, community, intergrated	Culture
Peaceful Warrior	"I proposed a design for this land, suggesting to put a boat pontoon at every dwelling because it was on a floodplain and you are going to have to build the house on stilts like in the Netherlands. The Dutch have been doing this for centuries- living on flooding land. They did not even respond"	Dutch, proposal, rejection	Culture
Chandler	"It is a cultural thing as well I would wage it. People do not think it is something they could or would want to do. They would think they could refurbish it but then they watch Grand Designs which focuses only on expensive and incredibly challenging developments which might put them off. When the easiest thing to do in the UK is to buy a home from the many house builders"	Cultural, challenging, misjudgement	Culture

Fig. 13- Theme of culture. By Author, 2021

apart, unlike the the group he had managed, who had known and trusted each other for two years (Ibid). When interviewees were asked how they would advertise these schemes to facilitate success, seven participants explained that they advertise them on social media and wait for ready-made groups to approach them.

Tellinga explains, from a Dutch perspective, that "we cannot say we do not have the skills anymore" (Tellinga, 2021), so the results generated further reasonings behind the lack of self-build in Britain rather than just the dwellers' inexperience, relationships and lack of drive.

Theme 3 - Time

The third theme was the time it requires to complete self-build schemes. All seven participants based in Britain acknowledged the long process of self-build. Tellinga, based in the

Netherlands, did not touch upon this theme. Brenton described how impressed she was at the commitment of her co-housing community, as their project "took 18 years to complete" (Brenton, 2021).

Dumas explains that the "time involved in dealing with self-build is quite considerable" which can be perceived as off-putting (Dumas, 2021). He believes self-build is more attractive to younger people, as he had the most engagement from students and lecturers (Ibid).

Chandler explains the importance of construction skills when carrying out self-build projects, as it could lead to a shorter process (Chandler, 2021). He described his self-build project as a "self-finish" rather than a self-build, as the group only completed basic tasks such as fittings and decorating due to time

constraints (Ibid). Chandler contacted builders to finish the advanced elements of the construction in order to meet the timeframe (Ibid).

Interviewees suggested that the time taken to complete a self-build project is also affected by government guidelines and local councils who delay self-builders' progression.

Theme 4 - Councils and Planning Permission

When questioned about the biggest hurdles of self-build, all seven British participants discussed their frustrations with the council and planning permission. Whilst Tellinga did not face any set backs with her local council in Almere, she acknowledged they were supportive. She recognises that is not always the case and city councils are "not interested in endless discussions" regarding unconventional living (Tellinga, 2021).

The British participants further explained the disinterest from the council regarding unconventional living. Brenton explains how you have to entice the council as they are "ossified" (Brenton, 2021). Gibbard represents York Council as less obstructive. Although she did have some setbacks with the council, they were more open to Yorspace's unconventional scheme (Gibbard, 2021). Gibbard further explained the reason her local council are more interested in unconventional schemes is because York City Council have a community-led housing officer, unlike other councils (Ibid).

Difficulty with Self-Build	Britain	The Netherlands
Difficulty- Finding Land	Yes	Yes
Difficulty- Councils and Planning Permission	Yes	Sometimes
Difficulty- Culture	Yes	No
Difficulty- the People	Yes	No
Difficulty- Time	Yes	No

Fig. 14- Comparative table for the difficulties of self-build mentioned in both areas. By Author, 2021

Positives with Self-Build	Britain	The Netherlands
Positives- Cheap Solution	No	Yes
Positives- Personal Pride	Yes	Yes
Positives- Variety	Yes	Yes
Positives- Community	Yes	Not mentioned
Positives- Sustainable	Yes	Not mentioned

Fig. 15- Comparative table for the positives of self-build mentioned in both areas. By Author, 2021

Smith believes that European countries have a greater amount of self-build schemes than Britain, as she works with European partners to promote straw panelling structures (Smith, 2021). Smith also believes there is a political impetus in Europe to establish self-build schemes and they generally want to succeed

(Ibid). This idea also emerged in Brenton’s interview, as she describes Britain as having “backward thinking” compared to the Netherlands (Brenton, 2021).

Dumas’ comments aligned with Smith’s. Dumas presented an alternative housing solution to the spaces around Lincoln

to the Head of Planning at Lincoln City Council, who were originally amazed and said they need more housing like this (Dumas, 2021). However, he was sceptical of the council’s excitement, as his unconventional project was not profitable (Ibid).

Tellinga considered the UK’s Right to Buy Scheme as a successful model to replicate in the Netherlands (Tellinga, 2021). However, Higginson demonstrated that some British local authorities put the self-build register on their website, but others will conceal it, as it makes it hard for the public to find and sign. Therefore, the true demand of self-build is not representative and they would not have to act upon the demand. “While they have an obligation to do it, they do not really want to do it” (Higginson, 2021).

Theme 5 - Culture

Four out of seven British participants mentioned cultural issues when they were questioned about the absence of self-build in Britain. For half of the interview, Brenton spoke of cultural issues, as she had experience of travelling to the Netherlands regularly to produce a co-housing model and write reports for Homes England housing corporation (Brenton, 2021). Consequently, she is familiar with both cultures and discovered a distinctive cultural difference between the two. She repeatedly described the Dutch as “flexible, inclusive and civic minded” when compared to Britain (Ibid).

Dumas experienced other cultures, so he explained how

communities are different in other countries compared to Britain. He has presented design proposals to Lincoln City Council for resolving local floodplain sites, similar to the Dutch way of living (Dumas, 2021). However, this was ignored. Housing developer Chandler also agreed that the lack of self-build is due to cultural issues (Chandler, 2021).

When asked why there are fewer self-builds in Britain compared to the Netherlands, Tellinga initially struggled to identify a reason, “I do not know why there is not many in Britain” (Tellinga, 2021).

Two tables were generated from the interview responses to compare both the advantages and disadvantages of each area.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the diverse range of primary sources in Britain further highlighted these obstacles to self-build, with all sharing very similar experiences. The research also generated a Dutch perspective. This was important to the scope of the research as it identified the themes which were specific to Britain and the themes that also correlated with the Netherlands.

The overarching question is whether community self-build is as “simple” and “collaborative” as Barlow describes it (Barlow et al, 2001). The review on Segal analysed the potential for simple self-build construction models (Marriott, 2016, 20), which rules out over-complexity as the main reason for self-build

vacancy in Britain. The role of the architect, as facilitator, can also produce more responsive and contextually relevant buildings (Holland, 2017, 104). The primary results within this paper are important to the research, because they reveal the aspects of community self-build that are not so “simple”, which did not emerge from the literature review. In the literature review, unavailability of land and issues with British local authorities were deemed, in reports and articles, to be the main obstructions of self-build (Wallace et al., 2013).

The theme of unavailability of land correlated with Wallace’s statistical data in the review (Ibid). Tellinga said that there is also a lack of available land in the Netherlands (Tellinga, 2021). Therefore, if the Dutch also experience the same perceived obstacle as Britain, yet have had success in self-build schemes, then the absence of self-build must be attributed to another cause. The effect of the 2008 financial crisis was recognised as a hinderance to self-builders, as large housing developers started to dominate the market once again, preventing self-builders from gaining a foothold. However, Tellinga’s project commenced before this financial crisis, so they did not experience as much competition for land within the market in the beginning (Tellinga, 2021). After the effects of the financial crisis had eroded, Tellinga was faced with a hinderance as developments carried on (ibid), showing the correlation of hurdles between both Britain

and the Netherlands. However, Tellinga’s project was inclusive, as she provided smaller plots of land within her scheme that people of low income could afford, compared to Britain, where plots of land are only affordable for people on middle to high incomes. Therefore, her project appears to be more accessible.

Six interviewees mentioned the motivation, construction skills and weak relationships between the people involved in these projects as a reason why these schemes were difficult. Segal created community cohesion with the 14 strangers on Lewisham’s waiting list, which was a successful element. Chandler believed the key to a successful self-build project relies within the community’s relationships (Chandler, 2021), as this would support them through the challenging days. Brenton was the only participant who approached people about self-build, rather than waiting for ready-made groups to approach her. However, she made sure that the group connected before they started working together, evidencing the importance of relationships for success.

Segal’s role as facilitator helped any inexperienced self-builders in Lewisham, however Chandler raised the issue with this in his profession. Chandler said that working as a facilitator can be challenging within the house development profession, as you do not have complete control over the quality and time of your building projects, which can be a big risk. This can prevent or block any progress

made by Segal in the self-build movement, as this role might not suit all self-build situations. Chandler spoke about how long his self-build project took to complete. However, time restrictions were put in place by other external bodies within his housing association. In other cases, as when self-builders own the home, time restrictions would be dictated by the self-builders themselves. This might relieve some of the pressure that comes with self-build.

The next obstacle that emerged is the role of the council, who can often delay self-build projects further. Dumas explains that you can spend “five years fighting with the council” before you even start building your home (Dumas, 2021). In the review, Holland says the obstacles of self-build are the obstructions from local authorities (Holland, 2017), rejecting unconventional design proposals against planning permission regulations. Ward’s anarchist views correlated with some of the primary responses, as they were all passionate about dweller control rather than governmental control that normally eliminates freedom when it comes to building dwellings. On the other hand, Tellinga could not provide an answer as to why Britain was so behind in these schemes compared to the Netherlands. This indicates that Britain has no reason to be behind, as both states seem to face similar obstacles. However, whilst all seven British participants found difficulties in dealing with the hurdle of the council, Tellinga did not seem to have

any frustration with her local council. She recognises that this is not always the case, therefore “dweller control” and unconventional aspirations can be limited in housing when there are political barriers that block that personal control. This can make any self-build ambition challenging.

The results and review show the Netherlands’ willingness to build unconventionally in order to tackle housing issues, such as living on a floodplain. Brenton states that Britain has a “backwards” culture, as Britain is reluctant to develop new ways of living when problems arise. Instead, Britons stick to conventional housing, which is not always fit for purpose. Brenton, through her experience in the Netherlands, believes they are more supportive and open to new ideas, which is attested to by Tellinga’s experience of receiving support from her local council (Tellinga, 2021). This reflects the wide variety of housing in the Netherlands. The literature review did not uncover culture as a barrier to self-build schemes. Political conservatism and bureaucracy, at all levels of the housing process, often prevent or stall realisation of unconventional schemes. The councils tend to adopt a risk-averse approach, shown by Dumas’ difficulty in getting a response from Lincoln Council in his proposal for boat pontoons and houses on stilts for a floodplain site, similar to the Netherlands. In his presentation to the council, he had proved that unconventional housing can be achieved safely. His scheme was rejected due

to its inability to generate high enough profits, as designs are often implemented due to their potential for financial reward. This shows that housing is viewed as a commercial enterprise rather than a direct benefit to the community. (Dumas, 2021). With a bit of unconventional thinking, councils could generate self-build schemes for a fraction of the price of a non self-build scheme. This was demonstrated in LILAC where they use locally-sourced straw material that was cheap and easy to install. A focus on sustainable, unconventional housing could produce long term benefits, but the councils do not seem to view it in this way, leading to overlooked possibilities.

Limitations in the methodology included the councils’ lack of response to both emails and telephone calls. This correlates with the theme of the council being the biggest hurdle to self-builders in Britain, as they were difficult to contact. This could cause a delay to self-build projects. In future research, conducting interviews with the council would be valuable to determine why they are so intransigent, as this research cannot provide the councils’ perspective on self-build.

This would reveal a new, unexplored area in the research, not covered by the perspective of a housing developer and a European self-build project manager. However, as Brenton describes, without connections to the local government, it is difficult for a normal person to gain access (Brenton, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The self-build method demonstrates community, sustainability and affordability advantages, but when it comes to Britain's priorities, there are cultural differences when compared to the Netherlands. Existing models prove its viability in theory, but the hurdles outlined in the results make the concept of self-build difficult to achieve in practice. It is impossible to identify a singular reason for the lack of British self-builders. However, the pervasive culture impacts on, and reflects in, other community self-build obstacles, such as the council, land unavailability and peoples' attitudes. Intransigent, conservative outlooks on housing in Britain is entrenched in local councils and planning systems, who have the power to determine whether schemes succeed or not. This attitude results in an excessive focus on conventional dwellings in Britain, as they fail to consider unconventional opportunities that could further benefit society. Conversely in the Netherlands, flexibility is inherent in cultural, political and social attitudes, leading to the creation of unconventional dwellings that are contextually relevant to the dwellers, the councils and the environment. Although Britain has passed legislation to support self-builders, such as the Right to Build Scheme, it is the way the legislation was implemented and the tools provided for its execution that are lacking. Segal's self-build work is admired by many. However, the compliance and motivation

of local authorities dictate the implementation of self-build, as they can make any strategy difficult to fulfill, even if it is compulsory (Higginson, 2021). As Higginson says, there is a difference between going to an exhibition and buying a plot of land (Ibid). Much like Segal, there is a big gap between admiring his work and applying his work in practice.

This difference in culture offers an explanation as to why Britain and the Netherlands face the same, significant barrier of unavailability of land, yet the Netherlands have managed to successfully deliver self-build schemes and Britain has not. It could be said that Britain are currently failing to propose unconventional living as the new "common" way of living, as this paper has revealed the notion of conservative values and strictness that prevail within current British councils, compared to the Netherlands. It questions the responsibility of their own dwellings, which is often in the hands of others.

This paper can be used by future researchers to further explore the depth of impediment of local councils by interviewing a range of local council members throughout Britain on the reasons of self-build vacancy. This is to see whether all local councils contribute equally to this obstruction, or whether it is more regional in nature. Without the support from powers of authority, movements such as the self-build movement can be widely difficult to develop as the new normal within housing.

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