

**Learning Through Building: Participatory action research and the
production of housing**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines potentials for using the philosophies and practices of participatory action research (PAR) within the production of housing. Drawing on findings from a collaborative build project, working with a group in housing need in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, the paper explores the added social and educational value that processes of collaborative design and making can offer those that might be socially and spatially isolated. The paper argues that participation in housing is often colonised by those that have existing social, economic or knowledge capital and therefore bringing PAR into conversation with housing offers some unique opportunities, and also challenges, that other forms of collaborative housing may not. In assessing these opportunities the paper focuses on the mechanics of participation, including ethics, processes of learning through making, power, care and the potential for personal and collective transformation.

KEYWORDS; Community-led housing, participatory action research, homelessness

Introduction

Through a case study of a collaborative build project entitled 'Protohome', which

involved working with homeless individuals in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK to build a prototype house, this paper examines what an attention to the philosophies and methodologies of participatory action research (PAR) can offer practices of housing. PAR involves collective enquiry into an issue, with an ultimate goal of social change and aims to democratise knowledge making, replacing an extractive mode of research with a co-produced approach, grounding it in real needs (Kindon *et al.*, 2007). There has been little written about what PAR can offer processes of designing and building housing, yet it offers some unique challenges and opportunities for forms of community-led housing (CLH).

This paper is framed within the growing CLH movement in the UK and beyond, whereby participation in housing is gaining increasing attention academically and politically. Whilst some of this work is grounded within issues of housing crisis and unaffordability (Hutson and Jones, 2002; Moore and Mullins, 2013; Mullins, 2010; Teasdale *et al.*, 2011; Turok, 1993), there are too few examples of co-produced housing by people without pre-existing building knowledge, capacity or financial capital, therefore the social and educational potentials arising from participation in housing by groups in most housing need are neglected.

Whilst the use of Protohome as a case study is tentative, as this was a temporary housing prototype, instead of a full, working house with services and infrastructure connected to it, there are some key lessons that have emerged from this study that paves

the way for further research and action on the role that PAR might play in housing. PAR offers some distinct methodological and ethical tools to bring forth more inclusive, critical

and transformational CLH practices. As a result this paper analyses the *mechanisms of participation* within design and build processes by placing emphasis on a reflexive methodology which prioritises learning through making, the role of communication and power, and how care and confidence are nurtured through participation. I highlight how practices of designing and making housing can be a tool for widening access to skills and qualifications, as well as generating opportunities for processes of personal transformation and the creation of new social networks for participant builders. This is a politicised process, one which questions how, where and by whom knowledge in housebuilding is nurtured, as well as aiming to bring forth the voices of those that have been the victims of housing precarity. As a result the paper seeks to create a tentative framework for conceptualising and critically analysing participation within housing processes.

The paper begins by contextualising participation in housing through the CLH sector, highlighting that there is a lack of engagement with those that are the victims of housing precarity and therefore the added social and educational value that participation in housing may offer is neglected. I then discuss PAR's roots and philosophy, and what unique opportunities it can offer practices of housing through its close attention to power and ethics – *how people work together* - and its overt political aim to catalyse multi scalar change through an embedded and non-hierarchical participatory process. Moving into the

empirical material I then discuss the approach and ethical framework of Protohome, with attention to the reflexive, self-reflective methodology. I discuss how the project aimed to challenge the dichotomy between the ‘professional designer/builder’ and the ‘amateur user/participant’ and the Cartesian separation between mind and matter, thinking and

doing, by foregrounding the importance of legitimating the experiential, pre-existing knowledge of participants, as well as through practices of ‘learning through making’ by focusing on the building typology we used - the Segal method. I then discuss how new social relations and confidences were conceived through the project for group members, yet at the same time I highlight moments of productive disagreement between people, and use this to call for a renewed focus on power within participatory processes of designing and building. Lastly, I discuss the political implications of bringing PAR into conversation with housing, through a discussion of personal and collective transformation and the self-representation of group members, and highlight some of the challenges inherent in undertaking PAR within housing processes.

Context: Participation in Housing

The ‘participatory turn’ in housing

Participation in housing, whether in the design or making process is gaining increasing attention across Europe. Whilst the term ‘community-led housing’ (CLH) is used in the UK (see Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017; Chatterton, 2015; Jarvis, 2011, 2015; Moore

and McKee, 2012; Moore and Mullins, 2013) the term ‘collaborative housing’ is used elsewhere in Europe (see Czischke, 2018; Fromm, 2012; Lang and Stoeger, 2018; Tummers, 2015). These terms broadly refer to housing that is designed and managed by local people to meet the needs of the community, as opposed to housing for private profit (Gooding and Johnston, 2015). Today CLH accounts for just 1% of UK homes, yet this varies across Europe – it is 18% in Sweden and 15% in Norway (Commission on Co-

operative and Mutual Housing, 2009). These practices have also been adopted into housing policy in the UK. In England, through the 2011 Localism Act, there has been a particular focus on self and custom build and neighbourhood planning, whilst in Scotland, community landownership has been at the forefront of policy (see the 2003 and 2016 Land Reform Acts and the 2015 Community Empowerment Act).

Despite new attention to CLH, there has been less attention given to participation in housing by those in housing and/or employment need or how participation in housing might respond to the ongoing effects of austerity policies and welfare reform (but see Moore and Mullins, 2013; Teasdale *et al.*, 2011). In England, rough sleeping increased by 165 per cent between 2010 and 2019, whilst placements in temporary accommodation have increased by 71 per cent since 2011 (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2019). Within a context of prolonged austerity the added social and educational value that co-produced housing processes may offer, (such as opportunities for skills building through design and construction training, and personal and collective transformation in the form of confidence building and the creation of new social networks), is particularly pertinent, but has yet to be fully examined within academic literature. Furthermore, whilst forms of CLH are

be fully examined within academic literature. Furthermore, whilst forms of CLH are undertaken through prolonged collaborative processes, usually over many years, which include collective decision making in project design, implementation and management, the *mechanics* of this participation - *how* people work together, the dynamics, tensions and power interplays inherent within these relationships, has had little attention in the CLH literature (but see Chatterton, 2015; Fernández Arrigoitia and Scanlon, 2017). Additionally, whilst accounts draw attention to ‘the community’ as a site for action and change, this is, arguably, seen as being bound, both socially and geographically. Local

power relations stemming from, for example, gender, class, age and ethnicity are often overlooked or ‘smoothed over’ (Coleman, 2007). Therefore in this literature the potential for CLH and other forms of collaborative housing not only to respond to new economic and social conditions, but also to actively resist and contest these conditions, is undervalued. Disengaging with both micro and macro power relations and assuming community homogeneity leaves structural constraints, which may prevent people from participating in CLH, such as poverty, weak ‘social capital’ and isolation from institutions of power, relatively untouched. Within this climate, without already existing economic and social capital or state support, inevitably poorer, urban communities, or vulnerable groups, less able or equipped, may be excluded (Barritt, 2012).

However, within the literature on tenant participation in social housing, power is often foregrounded. Birchall (1992) highlights the competing interests within the management of housing, between tenants, arms length management companies, councils, developers and others, whilst Cairncross *et al.* (1994; 1997) note the exclusion of social

tenants from the political framework of housing development and question who is being empowered in these processes by examining how residents are 'selected' to be political representatives on committees. Much of this literature explores theories of power from a post-structural, Foucauldian perspective, by examining how governmentality operates through enforced participation, which, in turn, acts to regulate human conduct and responsabilise the social tenant (Bradley, 2008; Flint, 2003; 2004; McDermont 2007; McKee, 2011; McKee and Cooper 2008).

There are however some examples of community self-build (CSB) projects which

do engage those in housing or employment need. This can be seen in Turok's (1993) account of a CSB project in Glasgow which engaged unemployed young people, Hutson and Jones' (2002) paper examining a CSB project with disadvantaged young people in Wales, Collins' (2017) account of a CSB project with ex-service personnel in housing need in Bristol and the 'Frontline' project in Ravenscar Mount, Leeds, which involved the building of 12 new homes by unemployed African-Caribbean individuals (Hendrickson and Auber, 2015). Furthermore, elsewhere in the world participation in housing is connected to broader social movements fighting for housing rights and the political representation of socially isolated groups. For example Slum Dwellers International is a network of grassroots groups in Africa, Asia and Latin America fighting for the rights of slum dwellers which has gained traction within national housing policy (Pieterse, 2008), whilst *Arquitetura Na Periferia* (Architecture on the Periphery) is a Brazilian organisation that works with women living informally, training them in

housebuilding skills. Whilst many movements have emerged through acute poverty and large scale housing informality, they also show the potential for participatory housing processes to be politicised, and for learning and knowledge building to be triggered through processes of organising, activating, designing and making.

Therefore a critical engagement into the practical and ethical mechanics of participation in housing and its political potential within projects, including how power is manifest within groups and between groups and macro institutions of power (such as the local state, the government and welfare agencies) is much needed. There is also a need to focus on how personal and collective knowledge building, social repair and political realisation can be triggered through co-produced housing processes, particularly for those

that are vulnerable or socially/spatially isolated. This requires close attention to the philosophical and methodological elements of participation which PAR foregrounds.

Participatory action research

PAR offers some useful tools and approaches to aid in bringing forth more critical and politicised accounts of co-produced housing, through its close attention to ethics and power in the participatory process and to the capacity of groups that have been exploited socially and economically to build and articulate knowledge and to use this for both personal and collective transformation (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 330).

PAR emerged in the Global South in response to efforts to decolonise the social sciences and bring forth new forms of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970 [2007]) by working with those that had been the victims of colonialism through programmes of social and economic 'development' (Fals-Borda, 2001, pp. 27-8). In its infancy it connected to various struggles regarding land reform and anti-colonialism and employed new research methodologies, such as 'praxis', whereby ideas are reshaped into actions (Fernandes and Tandon, 1981; Rahman, 1987). For the past two decades PAR's attention in academic contexts has been growing, as researchers have been questioning their role in a changing world (Kindon *et al.*, 2007, p. 1). PAR is now a prominent paradigm within the social sciences (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2004; Kindon *et al.*, 2007; McIntyre, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Taggart, 1997), and whilst PAR practitioners engage with a wide variety of research contexts, issues and methods, underlying all of these is an ethical commitment to challenge the imbalance between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' by conducting

collaborative research which attempts to challenge the hierarchies normally ascribed within academic research (Kindon *et al.*, 2007; Wadsworth, 1998). Therefore an extractive process of research is replaced by a collaborative one. Working *with* people, not *on* them through the co-production of new knowledge offers potential to create embedded and equitable processes of learning, particularly for individuals who may be socially and/or spatially isolated or excluded from networks of political or economic power. And so PAR's distinctiveness is not just about the *terms* of the engagement, it is also about *who* engages.

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PAR foregrounds power relations, both within the participatory process as well as beyond it (such as structural violence, racism and poverty). Recent work on PAR has been influenced by a poststructural, Foucauldian approach to power (as with the literature on tenant participation of social housing cited above). Kesby *et al.* (2007, p. 19) argue that 'while PAR is a form of power, its effects are not only negative. Rather they are messy, entangled, highly variable and contingent. Furthermore power is not only 'a commodity that can be held or redistributed, but [is] an effect: an action, behaviour or imagination' (Kesby *et al.*, 2007, p. 20). Here the Foucauldian notion of governmentality highlights how human conduct is regulated through the participatory process, causing people to exert power negatively over others, for example in the production of 'disciplined subjects', the reinforcement of existing power relationships within communities or the production of participants as subjects who require 'research'/'development' (Kesby *et al.*, 2007, p. 21; see also Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Yet PAR aims to go beyond merely *recognising* the power relations that are at play in people's lives, it actively seeks to upturn these through self-representation, whereby

people speak *through* their direct experience of oppression – a route to empowerment. Consequently, PAR creates opportunities to question the supposed truths of dominant claims to knowledge, highlighting that knowledge is not always centred or produced *in* the centre, but might be concentrated over vast geographical distances or in groups and communities that have little economic wealth. This offers a powerful route to challenge the authority of economic and political elites, providing opportunities to speak 'to' and 'with' instruments of power - a process which has potential to lead to personal and collective transformation and political realisation (Freire, 1970 [2007]). This is an

overt agenda that is missing from other forms of enquiry/practice. As a result PAR provides both a philosophical and a methodological framework for enacting an approach to co-produced housing which connects the design and build of housing to processes of social, political and educational learning.

However the evolution and growing popularity of PAR within academia and beyond has brought critique. Critics note that PAR is often practiced without an understanding and appreciation of its wider epistemology with regards to decentring knowledge production, and so researchers often fail to relinquish control, that projects often reproduce the inequalities they seek to challenge by underplaying dominant power relations, that it is often applied in a 'toolbox' like manner, instead of being grounded in the specificities of people and place, that projects become depoliticised when 'formalised' within the academy and other institutions of power (such as governments, international agencies and the third sector who have used participation to legitimise policies of western modernisation and globalisation), and therefore projects become disengaged from radical politics seeking structural change (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Frideres, 1992; Wynne-

Jones *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, today PAR is used in many (mainly academic) contexts which may not directly impact or work with those that have been the victims of oppression (see Rudman *et al.*, 2017; Whitman *et al.*, 2015). However I am interested in returning to the roots of PAR, to its mobilisation of social change. Therefore it is important not only *how* personal and collective transformation takes place, but also *who* is being empowered. This conviction feeds back into my aforementioned critique of CLH as

a sector which often excludes those without social, economic or knowledge capital, who are also often those with the least choice in housing. Instead PAR refocuses attention onto those that are the victims of oppression or, in the case of this research, those most affected by housing inequalities. As a result a critical engagement with PAR as an epistemological and methodological framework may provide a basis to enact a more politicised and potentially transformative CLH movement for those with little wealth or power.

PAR and housing

To my knowledge there are no UK studies to date that use PAR in the design and build of housing, however there are PAR projects which focus on housing-related issues (see Hardy and Gillespie, 2016; Whitzman, 2017). Whilst the CSB projects described above offer a good starting point for engaging with more embedded and transformative participatory processes within housing, the approach I am advocating for aims to use the process of housing production as an overt social and political tool to bring change at an individual and collective level, as in the aforementioned international cases which link housing and social activism.

In bringing PAR into conversation with housing I aim to offer an alternative ethical and political approach to housing which attempts to work within a relatively hierarchy free structure and looks to redistribute power and give wider access to resources for designers/builders. This means that the process is led by participant designers/builders,

with their voices and actions setting the terms and boundaries of the project, alongside professionals who act as 'enablers'. Aiming to engage those in most housing and/or employment need means that there is a real focus on how the methodology – the learning and capacity building process – can be used as a political tool to bring forth the voices of those that may be spatially and/or socially isolated or the victims of an increasingly faltering welfare state. This means that within the methodology there is a real focus on knowledge building, learning, and the care and social relationships that are built between people through this process. This is a methodology which aims to challenge the mainstream imagination of house-building as one that is a complex, technical activity, and through this to trouble the Cartesian separation of the maker from the user of housing, by questioning how and where design and build knowledge is embedded and whether it can emerge from the bottom up, making use of tacit and experiential knowledges. There is also a chance to bring forth new typologies of housing architecture which are more conducive to participation. As a result part of the imperative to bring PAR into conversation with housing is to challenge the current hegemony of housing production, in which housing is used a method of capital accumulation by investment companies, developers and house-builders, and instead use housing as an overt social and political tool to bring forth the voices of those that are oppressed by the current housing system, whilst at the same time critically reflecting on the role of power in the participatory process.

Below I discuss how the concepts and practices of PAR were manifest in a live build project in Newcastle upon Tyne. I use this tentative example to activate a discussion

build project in Newcastle upon Tyne. I use this tentative example to activate a discussion into what bringing PAR into housing production might mean through a focus on ethics, power, the methodology of making, care and the building of personal relationships and the potentials for personal and collective transformation. The use of this example intends to open an area of research, instead of providing an exhaustive account of the potentials for PAR within housing. Furthermore, because this example was not a 'working' housing model, it cannot speak to issues of land procurement, funding or planning (issues that are well-narrated within the CLH literature (see Chatteron, 2015; Gooding and Johnston, 2015)). There is thus a need for further scholarship on PAR and housing to follow.

Protohome

Project outline

Protohome was a collaboration between Crisis, the national charity for single homelessness and their members (individuals who are homeless, have been homeless in the last two years or are at risk of homelessness), xsite architecture (a local architecture firm), TILT Workshop (an art and joinery organisation) and myself, as project initiator. It was a collaboratively built housing prototype, built over the course of four months and was temporarily sited in the Ouseburn area of Newcastle, occupying a site owned by a local development trust, from May-August 2016 and open to the public (see Figure 1). Whilst Protohome was open it exhibited the documentation of the project and hosted a

range of events, workshops, exhibitions, performances, artist residencies and talks

examining issues of homelessness, the politics of land and development and participatory housing alternatives. Following the events programme Protohome was deconstructed and reconstructed at a local community farm to be used as a classroom/workshop. A publication and a website (www.protohome.org.uk) was also created so that the impact and reach of the project could extend beyond the building, to continue conversations on these issues into the future. Protohome is not a 'complete' housing model, instead it is a test, a prototype, a 'shell' of a building at 5 metres x 10 metres in size, without insulation or services. Yet it is a model which does show the potential to be extended into 'working' housing in the future.

[Insert Figure 1 near here]

Process overview

The project was launched to Crisis members in February 2016. Membership of the project was open to all and individuals were free to join or leave the project at any time during the process. Overall 14 members of Crisis contributed to the project, whilst nine stayed with the project throughout. Three of these members were women and all had very different experiences of homelessness - some were 'at risk' of homelessness, living in crowded or unsuitable accommodation, some were street homeless, whilst others were 'sofa surfing', sleeping on friends' or relatives' sofas, or living in hostels. Following the launch, joiners from TILT Workshop and I worked with members of Crisis two half days a week for three months to train them in woodwork and design skills and to build the 'house' in sections in Crisis' wood workshop. We used the Segal system of timber-frame

building which is a method specifically designed for untrained self-builders, which I discuss further below.

Most members did not have any previous experience of woodwork, so we began by learning how to use basic tools, such as chisels and saws, learning different jointing techniques and using these activities to build the furniture for Protohome (see Figure 2). During the first few weeks we also focused on building knowledge about design, undertaking two sessions with the architect whereby members designed their own homes using a design template for Protohome. These designs were exhibited in the finished building to show the flexibility of the design system we were using, which is based on a dimensional grid. This allowed members to show creativity and individual needs and wants, by differently separating the space and adding outdoor areas. The designs also highlighted individual preferences and lifestyles. For example one member, Daz, designed a large kitchen because he enjoyed cooking and was undertaking training in cookery in Crisis' café, whilst Nyree made room for a small workshop to continue her woodwork skills in the home. Knowledge about the planning and building process emerged through instances of seeing and hearing, including a site visit, whereby members discussed how the building might respond to its immediate environment, and a visit to a self-built Segal house in Northumberland where we met the two architects who had built it. The use of a precedent like this was an important tool to inspire and motivate members. Whilst much of the structure of the building was completed on site, each week in the workshop members learnt a new skill, for example learning how to construct window frames or doors, and during this period members acquired qualifications, distributed by Crisis, including working with hand tools, health and safety and lifting and handling. Yet, as I

highlight below, beyond building individual and collective knowledge, our time in the Crisis workshop was vital in building group trust, confidence and a sense of collective purpose.

[Insert Figure 2 near here]

After three months in the Crisis workshop we went onto site for two weeks to construct the building, using the elements built in the workshop, whilst the frame, flooring, walls and roof were completed on site. During this period Crisis members worked on site for four hours a day, from Monday to Friday, yet members had an active involvement in all processes of building, including cutting timber, lifting and securing materials into place, painting and installing the exhibition of project documentation, and so during this period the learning did not stop. The role of Crisis throughout the project was vital, as they provided pastoral support, advice on training, skills, employment and housing for group members, as well as resources for the project as a whole by providing a space to work in, organising trips and refreshments.

During the workshop process I conducted twelve individual interviews and three focus groups which concentrated on personal histories, hopes and futures, and experiences of the project. In September, whilst we were deconstructing and moving the building to its new site, I conducted five evaluation interviews with people who were involved in the project from the beginning. Completing evaluation interviews four months after the project finished allowed me to track changes in group members' lives - whether they had accessed employment, housing or further skills. It also gave them an opportunity

to reflect on the process and the role that the project had played/was playing in their lives. These interviews and focus groups were not intensive or extensive. Discussions took place in both an informal setting (over cups of tea and biscuits in the workshop, on a windy beach in Northumberland or whilst eating sandwiches on the Protohome site), as well as in a more formal setting (during organised focus groups and interviews), and instead of recording data through more formal routes I often just took notes of conversations or activities as it was often easier to get members to open up in informal scenarios.

Approach and ethical framework

PAR is contingent on an embedded and responsive participatory process. Throughout the project we used an open and reflexive methodology, using a cyclic process of *planning, action and reflection* (Kesby *et al.*, 2007), which involved gathering knowledge on building techniques and processes, planning a task and then actioning this, and finally reflecting on what worked and what could be improved in order to begin the cyclic process again. Reflection was particularly important as it established a sense of self and collective criticality and allowed members to assess the knowledge gained. This methodology meant that members could be involved in decision-making processes and enabled the parameters of the project and the activities to adjust to changing conditions and challenges. The lives of group members were complex and brought with them certain sensitivities, as people moved on and off the streets, had health and money troubles. As a result an 'ethic of care' (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007) between people needed to be

cultivated over time. The making process became a conduit to have conversations about

the issues troubling people, and offered a space to better understand personal pasts and presents. In PAR these processes of building understanding and knowledge of one's own situation is vital as it is only through this that personal realisation and transformation can occur.

Understandably, when a process is co-produced and not fixed, this may bring forth complex ethical issues that other, non-participatory frameworks may not. Due to the fluid and emergent nature of the project, the ethical framework was designed to be reflexive in order to respond to shifting needs and situations, instead of being a fixed practice (Armstrong and Banks, 2011; Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). This approach differs from standard professional or research ethics which is a more generalised, 'box-ticking' exercise (Armstrong and Banks, 2011, p. 24). Instead, PAR tends to raise more complex ethical issues which may be beyond the scope of institutional guidelines. Furthermore, as joiners, architects and researchers, we were not only accountable to a university ethical review panel, but more importantly to participants, which, in the case of our project, were potentially vulnerable. As a result, members wrote a Group Contract, which outlined the ethics of the project which included having respect and care for each other, the importance of listening and looking out for each other's wellbeing in the workshop and on site. As one member, Nyree, said, 'sharing responsibility... for each other, for the equipment, for the wood, for the whole build and for the project itself' was vital.

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These methodological tactics helped members own and direct the process, to represent themselves, as well as to look after each other through nurturing a sense of reciprocity which was rooted in a commitment to others. This ethic of care is vital in PAR

projects, but particularly in build projects when overall group safety is often reliant on the group working effectively as a collective.

The professional as enabler

Processes of participation are never without hierarchies, whether these emerge from professionals or from the group/community itself. As I highlight below, power is always present, yet when there is a process of knowledge building taking place – in our case designing and building knowledge – whereby there is a need for ‘outside’ professionals, there is always a danger that the process will be co-opted by this expertise or that professionals will hold onto their knowledge, meaning that no ‘devolution of knowledge’ (Fals-Borda, 1987, p. 344) to groups/communities takes place. This is a particular risk in building and housing processes which is seen as a technical activity, through which the power to control development processes and access to resources connected to this (be this knowledge, tools, equipment, networks or infrastructures) often resides with a range of professionals in the public, private and third sectors, such as developers, architects, builders, housing managers, estate agents and local government officers (Raco, 2013). Yet as Allen (2003) writes, authority need not be a negative exercise in power, instead expertise can enable whereby professionals can be important catalysts for knowledge production and learning. As Arendt (1961) claims, authority is

not something that is merely *recognised*, it is also *claimed*. It is something that is held *among* people, not always *over* them. During Protohome we tried to challenge the dichotomy between the ‘expert’ and the ‘amateur’ through the cyclic process of planning, action and reflection, as well as through building a sense of trust, respect and reciprocity

between tutors and members. Here the tutor took on the role of the ‘interpreter and coordinator rather than dictatorial designer’ (Fowles, 2000ab, p. 62). The role of ‘interpreter’ was particularly important. The housing and building industries are full of technical jargon, which isolates those without ‘received knowledge’ of the sector, so part of the role of the joiner and myself was to break language barriers down, not through ‘dumbing down’ terminology, but through careful explanation, grounded in real life examples.

[Insert Figure 3 near here]

In line with PAR’s imperative to build critical capacity, Dean, the lead joiner, attempted to expand the analytical skills of the group by asking members: ‘What shall we do next? What’s working? What’s not working?’, prompting them to assess and change the course of the process and to problem solve. So instead of leading members directly, he led them indirectly. He also taught through trial and error whereby members learnt by trying and sometimes failing – such as the creation of complex joints, which one member, Daz, had particular trouble with, stating, ‘It looks like I’ve done it with a chainsaw!’. Yet the success of this methodology was realised when members started teaching other.

Furthermore, the joiner and myself wanted to remove the workshops from an atmosphere of 'schooling', whereby the teacher tells and the student listens. Freire calls this the 'banking' concept of education – the one way 'transfer' of knowledge which turns the students into 'receptacles to be 'filled' by the teacher' (1970 [2007], p. 72). Our approach opened up opportunities for challenging, questioning and dissensus and for creative interrogation into our own professional working practices. As a result our own normative

practices were often challenged - we were also subjects of learning throughout the project. When asked about the 'teacher-learner' relationship during Protohome, Nyree stated, "You're doing it wrong', it's that whole expression. Nobody in the whole time in the Crisis woodshop or in Protohome, nobody once said to me *ever*... 'You're doing it wrong', or 'You're not doing it right". This goes back to the sense of collective ethics, or 'communitarianism', as Allen writes, 'The idea of a hierarchical authority based upon technical expertise or impersonal rules stands in sharp contrast... to this more *lateral* sense of authority in the social community' (2003, p. 58). Yet getting this balance right required the joiner and myself to be awake to our own positionality and privilege and to analyse how we might impose 'well meaning' values and practices on members. Yet it helped that Dean also had experience of homelessness – this shared experience was useful to break down the barrier between 'learner' and 'teacher'.

PAR foregrounds the pre-existing knowledge and skills held by people – experiential knowledge that should be put to work and grounded. Many Protohome members had relevant knowledge stemming from past experiences: Tony had experience

of self-building during a youth programme abroad, Chris had spent time in Borneo in the army and had witnessed mass participation in housing by ordinary people using reclaimed materials, whilst Nyree had experience of woodwork from her childhood when her father was renovating their family home. Peter, who was street homeless throughout the project, would discuss his ad hoc means of making 'home' on the streets, which involved scavenging for objects and materials and repurposing them - making a bed out of pallets, using waste fabric to create 'curtains' for privacy and using discarded glow sticks as lights. For Peter the repurposing of material did not only arise out of a certain

resourcefulness developed through scarcity, it also arose out of an innate creativity, as this quote suggests:

'Knowing that something's not getting wasted and that I've done something with something that would normally go in the bin... It also makes you happy as well... I'm making key chains out of bike chains... I'm separating the links and then where the link hole is you put yer key in and then hammer it shut again and there's the key ring... Fridge magnets out of bottle tops and champagne corks... I get the lead from round roundabouts off car wheels... And I melt the little blocks of lead down and turn them into magnets'.

These experiences, existing knowledges and forms of creativity were harnessed and legitimised through different tasks, whether these were standard woodwork tasks or more creative tasks such as getting members to design a sign for the building out of scrap joints.

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30 Protohome catalysed a design and build process which attempted to trouble the dichotomy between the 'amateur' and the 'expert', and ways of teaching that merely 'impart' knowledge from one individual to another, at the same time as legitimising, valuing and employing the knowledge members already had.

Learning through making

As highlighted above, an imperative within PAR is to challenge received, 'professional' forms of knowledge. In this project this meant challenging 'stable' housing types and building processes through the use of the Segal system of self-building. This

system makes use of simple hand tools, standard material sizes, and is a design system built on a dimensional grid, making plans easy to understand by 'lay' builders (see the dimensional grid in Figure 4). Furthermore, because it is built with a post and beam timber frame the walls are not load bearing, meaning that walls can be positioned at will (Broome, 2005, p. 70). The architect Walter Segal aimed to democratise and demythologise the design and build process using tools and processes, such as dry jointing techniques, which are cheap and easy to acquire or learn for construction by untrained self-builders. Furthermore, using a limited number of standard components which can be assembled in many different ways allows a greater variety of building type through modular rearrangement (Umenyilora, 2000). As a result this system makes self-building achievable and understandable, even for those without any previous woodwork skills and it also offers an approach through which learning can occur whilst building, as I highlight in detail below. For Protohome members, using hand tools allowed a certain

autonomy within the build process. Not only did we not need to purchase expensive tools, but we also learnt about the distinct properties of materials through the physical involvement of the hand with the material. In the workshop we had a discussion about the strengths of using hand tools over power tools and the connection to processes of learning:

Jane: ‘... using machines is cheating, it’s not really made by you it’s made by machines.’

Daz: ‘You’ve not learnt nothing... Apart from pulling a lever.’

...

Jane: ‘I... I’d rather be quite happy just doing [it] by hand because then you know you’ve done it and if you keep practicing with the hand tool then you’ve learnt how to make it properly by yourself... you can’t really learn how to make a thing properly with a machine ‘cause it’s going to be perfect every time, but if you use... hand tools you can make it perfect your own way.’

Julia: ‘... so you think using your hands as opposed to a machine that... you’ve got more ownership over it?’

Jane: 'Yes.'

Julia: "Cause you can look at that and go...'

Jane: 'I made that, it wasn't done by a machine – hah!' [Laughs]

...

Dean: 'If you were using power tools all the time... you're just learning how to use a particular tool... The whole point of this project is that with very limited tools we can build something quite substantial... well you can now just with a saw and a chisel, you see that's the point, that you can make pretty

much anything just with a few little tools and that's how they've done it for thousands of years. So it's more interesting because you're actually getting skilled up.'

Jane: 'It just goes to show... you don't need machinery to make stuff.'

...

Julia: 'So it means that you could go home [Daz],... you've got some

wood... at home...'

Jane: 'Ah, he's got a shed full.'

Julia: '... get a saw...'

...

Daz: 'Get meself a table and chairs up for the garden.'

Julia: 'Instead of thinking 'I need...'

Daz: '... to go to B&Q and buy it.'

...

Jane: 'You can do it without having to go out and buy the stuff. Like at the beginning of the course I probably would of just thought 'Ah right... the weather's getting nice we'll just go to B&Q and buy it, a bench and some chairs and you're at like nearly, say... £200, but if you go and just buy...'

Daz: '... a hammer and a chisel...' [Laughs]

Dean: 'Yeah and some wood and you can make it yourself.'

Jane: 'You can make it yourself, cheaper!'

Dean: 'And it's better though 'cause it's yours.'

As the above conversation suggests, by making use of tools that are affordable, easy to acquire and use and simple processes of making, group members could then extend these newly learnt skills into other areas of their life, for example in personal DIY projects. Learning through making was a key ethos of Protohome. Within PAR the experiential production of knowledge is vital, with knowledge rooted in experience, not the abstract (Fals-Borda, 1987). This challenges the Cartesian division between mental and physical work (Fowles, 2000a) and disturbs inherited binaries of architect-user, professional-amateur, rational-experimental and thinking-doing. As PAR highlights there is a gap between language and bodily activity, yet most learning is tacit and non-linguistic, it is generated in practice, whilst western models of learning assume that

knowledge is generated through language (Mohan, 1999, p. 45). Perhaps as Sennett suggests, we have an inability to put practice into words: 'language is not an adequate 'mirror-tool' for the physical movements of the human body' (2008, p. 95), instead learning through PAR should unite mind and body. This sense of learning as rooted in practice 'provides a basis for escaping the strictures of dominant cognitivist and individualistic notions of learning' (Sennett, 2008, p. 62). Through this process the

subject learns, builds social networks and forms identity, which connects with the wider imperative stemming from Protohome – that of personal and group transformation through the act of building, as I highlight in the following section.

[Insert Figure 4 near here]

Therefore some architectural forms and processes of building can be enabling, creative and flexible like the Segal method, whilst others can be disabling. Whilst the work of Segal is significant, similar systems of building have been advocated by John Habraken (1972), who separated the building frame or ‘supports’ from the infill, through John Turner’s (1977) work on ‘site and service’

schemes in the Global South or, more recently, work on ‘degrowth’, which challenges the hegemony of increasing production and consumption, by arguing that overconsumption lies at the root of long term environmental and social inequalities (D’Alisa *et al.*, 2014). For architecture this means generating new organisational models

of designing and constructing which focus on democratic participation, as well as material processes such as reusing or reclaiming materials, refurbishment, designing down or using locally sourced materials. This requires more research and material experimentation into building methods and materials which are socially and ecologically sustainable and more conducive to participation. Within Protohome this may have meant that instead of using large sheets of plywood purchased from a local builder's merchant, which required some strength to move into position, we could have used timber sourced from a local saw mill, or smaller modularity, such as hand produced bricks, that could be moved into place by one person.

Becoming 'an extension of each other': care and connection

Dean: '...without us all working together...'

Tony: 'It's not going to work is it really?... If all the cogs aren't working in the machine then it stops, it doesn't work.'

...

Nyree: 'The best part of it is watching people come together and share a task

and think about their place when this thing comes together and opens, but it's not just that end thing, it's the process of doing it.'

Fundamentally, relationships between group members were at the core of the project. This emerged most resolutely in individual and group evaluations. In recognition of the need to build strong interpersonal relationships when working with potentially vulnerable people, and on a project that could be dangerous, the first three months in the Crisis workshop was vital, not just to build skills but also social relationships. PAR places importance on healing alienation and restoring community, particularly for groups where loss and precarity is a feature of everyday living. As Reason writes, 'It is not so much about the search for truth and knowledge as it is about healing. And above all, healing the alienation, the split that characterises the modern experience' (1998, p. 42). Central to this is a recognition that humans are bound up in a mutual 'interdependence' with each other (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and so the prevention of harm to one another is paramount. During Protohome this required deep, attentive listening, being responsive to the needs of members, and, as highlighted above, critical reflection of power and positionality.

Furthermore, in processes of building, when working as a team you're often physically supporting each other, for example to take the weight of a piece of wood (see Figure 5) or offering a seat to someone when they're tired, and so understanding the mental and physical strengths and limits of each other is vital. But this is also about sharing responsibility when something goes wrong, when something physically falls apart, when a piece of wood splits, when a concrete paving stone cracks, when a cut slips off the pencil line. Dean described how we needed to be 'an extension of each other', if

someone (put) their hand out, I'll put the right tool in their hand and vice versa

someone put[s] their hand out, I'll put the right tool in their hand and vice versa, because you're kind of always watching what other people are doing'. These collective working practices were of great importance because, as Dean said, in large scale builds, 'if one thing stops functioning then the job wouldn't get done', but in the worst case, if we failed to work together, to watch out for each other, then someone could get physically hurt. And so the initial process of group formation within any PAR project is key, as this conversation highlights:

Sarah: '... to me it was like learning to work with other people. You know people that you haven't really met and known as long, so you kind of get the... gist of the ups and downs of people never mind just yersel, it's how other people... work around yer and how [you] would work with other people.'

Tony: 'Cause we all stuck together and acted like a proper team, looked after each other, instead of arguing and squabbling on.'

Drawing on the work of Yalom (1970) into interpersonal theory and small group development, we saw an initial phase of *hesitation*, whilst members oriented themselves both physically in the workshop space and socially with other members and tutors. As Dean recalls, 'when we first started everyone was quite insular and working on their own', whilst Daz said, 'A lot of people were quiet at the start compared to now'. Furthermore, some people were quite wary of each other, as Nyree noted: 'I think... we put on a lot of layers, don't we?' There was then a second phase in which individuals felt

that they could open up to others and perhaps offer a viewpoint. This was a moment in which the seeds of trust and confidence were growing. There was finally a third phase when the group became extremely close, supporting each other on an emotional and a technical level, not just in the workshop but also outside of this space. Reciprocity between group members continued after the project through friendships and informal support mechanisms. But it must be noted that some people found the establishment of trust easier than others - some were actively *looking* to build trust and relationships, whilst others were more isolated.

[Insert Figure 5 near here]

Rather than being 'designed into' the project from the start, relationships were nurtured gradually (Heron and Reason, 1997), emerging through moments of mutual support, listening, spontaneous acts of kindness (like having a disagreement with someone and then in the next breath asking whether they would like to share a cigarette) and shared laughter (like Nyree saying to Daz: 'You can just brighten up a room with the words you come out with'). The workshop became an important site of sociality, not merely a place of learning, but of uninhibited chatter - the laughs and energy giving the room its rhythms. So what members described as the 'bonding experience', only occurred through making space for these conversations, whether meaningful or not, to take place.

But this is not to say that power was not present. As social dynamics were constantly changing and being reproduced, tensions and power relationships did occur, but care was taken by Dean and myself to avoid glossing over power relationships but to

actively highlight and disrupt potentially exploitative or manipulative relationships that occurred either within or through the project (as a result of different personalities, dependencies or gender) or which framed group members' lives in a wider sense (such as their relationship to the state, to housing or homeless services) (England, 1994). During Protohome we witnessed how productive disagreement can open up quite a different form of democratic practice than through consensus building methods (Miessen, 2010; Mouffe, 1992, 2000). As a result it was important not to view power as a ubiquitous force, but as a *relational effect* brought into being through participants' action, behaviour, dialogue and imagination, as in the discussion of governmentality above (Allen, 2003; Kesby *et al.*, 2007; Foucault, 1977, 2008). Consequently, there was a need to make space for honest dissensus, to allow people to work through their differences in a safe space (Mouffe, 1992), as highlighted in the conversation below. Whilst this may be challenging and disruptive, it can also be an honest and productive. These real, felt and lived properties of power, a poststructuralist view of power as an effect, emerging through thought and behaviour, as highlighted above - what Allen (2003) terms 'power in proximity' - were bound up in group scenarios whereby some voices were heard whilst some were silent. Furthermore, there were times when power relationships came to the fore in an obvious and antagonistic manner. Often external factors impacting members' lives affected the atmosphere of the whole group, as Nyree stated, 'not a one of us hasn't had some kind of like hellish struggle to do with health,... money, benefits, our housing situations... I mean every one of us has had problems but coming to this gave us the strength to deal with them'. And on occasions tensions did emerge, particularly with individuals who worked less well in a group scenario or were going through a difficult period personally. For example, for Peter's personal difficulties often emerged in the workshop - sometimes due

to a lack of sleep, or because of his mental health, or because it was raining, or when his belongings were taken by Newcastle's Business Improvement District street rangers who clean the streets, or when he'd had a brush with a police officer. These tensions emerged and were sometimes difficult to deal with. The conversation below highlights a point in the project when Peter was struggling with his mental health, which emerged in moments of frustration directed at other members:

Julia: 'What's wrong Peter?'

Peter: 'I wish I could hit her with a hammer but I know I can't.'

Julia: 'Who?'

Peter: 'This has gone skewwhiff 'cause I'm asking Nyree to work together and help us but she's gannin deeing her own thing. Work together as part of *a team.*'

Nyree: 'I agree. I agree.'

Peter: 'Well if you agree *why were you fucking over there?!*'

Julia: 'Peter, come on!'

Nyree: 'If you say it nicer, you see because [you said], 'Why are you

fucking...' I'm thinking...'

Julia: 'Yeah, just say it nicer Peter.'

Nyree: 'If you say it nicely I might *consider* it.'

Peter: 'Right right. You want the nice nice approach.'

Julia: 'And you don't need to swear, like.'

Peter: 'I won't, I won't, I won't.'

Reflecting back on this conversation later in the project Nyree stated,

'Well personally for me speaking it was just like any other family. There were moments that were tricky... there were moments when there was a bit of miscommunication or there were moments when people were just upset, and because of that whole supportive environment, because of that openness,... because it was family, we all supported each other through those tricky moments so they never lasted'.

Allen (2003) states that whilst proximity can create power and authority, it may also open up opportunities for the building of trust. Whilst there were moments of ‘instrumental’ power – power held over someone, rooted in some sort of conflict, as we

can see in the above conversation, there were also moments of self-discovery – of ‘associational’ power – power rooted in mutual action and in the formation of a ‘common bond’ (Mouffe, 1992, p. 233), and a sense of reciprocity, of mutual interdependency, as can be seen Nyree’s use of the word ‘family’ in the quote above. There were also moments when instrumental power was transformational, was *productive*, in the poststructuralist vein I highlighted earlier. Perhaps it was a breaking point that needed to occur to move beyond it – like the heated conversation between Peter and Nyree. As a result, whilst power relations emerged in the group, through heated conversations, or through the frustrations of working as a team, these were confronted through honest discussion and reflection. That is not, of course, to say that power did not continue to be present in thought or imagination.

Through the project strong group relationships helped build personal confidence and trigger processes of social repair. Nurturing sociality can be an important way to aid social isolation. Yet friendship, the ‘wrapping together’ (Jackson, 2015) of people, does not end when the project finishes, but can be a catalyst for trying new things, forging new opportunities. New confidences are grown and some members mentioned that a ‘new mentality’ - a new ‘way of seeing’ – came to the fore which became a catalyst for how futures were imagined. Thus nurturing confidence and sociality can be a powerful tool of transformation, which moves beyond psychological space and into physical lived lives. In

transformation, which moves beyond psychological space and into physical lived lives. In the conversation below we can see how this confidence was beginning to shape everyday lives:

Tony: ‘... unfortunately I was on the streets... for just under a year before I

actually signed up for Crisis... It’s not actually very nice being on the streets but now I’m back to be honest with you. I’m feeling confident, I’ve got a bit more experience and, touch wood, I’m never back there in that situation again.’

Daz: ‘... getting up in the morning and getting motivated to come here... It changes your life, it’s just not living the same lifestyle, open to try new things.’

Control over life choices may actively offer a space to discuss futures and realistic aspirations. Since the project ended, two members have entered paid work (one in construction), five members are now in sustained housing and one member has enrolled at college, stating, ‘I’m actually able to do... calculations and things I forgot. I forgot... what I was capable of doing’ Thus for some members it was a learning process through which self worth emerged - ‘It’s showing me that I can do what other people are saying I can’ - instead of feeling a burden on society, as one who is homeless, or living on benefits, or having health troubles.

It is the creation of social ties for those that may be physically or socially isolated, that may be stuck in certain rhythms and routines, that is vital in participatory build process. Sociality creates opportunities for change, it creates trust and confidence, but as I have highlighted, feeling 'at home' with those around you can also create further opportunities for self-reflection and what Freire (1970 [2007]) calls 'conscientisation', whereby a critical awareness of a personal situation is fostered which leads to positive

action, thus providing real opportunities for personal and collective growth.

I have managed to follow the different routes that members have taken since the project ended. Some have entered employment, training or are now in stable housing. For others such a project was too fleeting and the issues engrained within their lives too severe. Nevertheless there is some degree of evidence to suggest that social remediation can occur through embedded participatory processes. And whilst this was a fleeting project, longer projects might bring forth longer lasting change for group members, particularly if this enabled people to access stable and secure housing.

Political implications

Through participatory approaches to housing and the co-production of knowledge, new truths and representations may be brought forth. This is a practical and grounded form of theorisation, as highlighted above, - praxis - informed action that leads to creative transformation. This form of conscientisation means that the 'oppressed' begin

to question and critique the structures and actions that oppress them. Sometimes these might be the very structures that seem key to their survival, such as, in the case of many Protohome members, welfare institutions. During Protohome this occurred through the process of building, through group conversations about homelessness and self-build, and through self-representation when the building was open to the public and members presented the project and spoke about their experiences of being in housing need to people in positions of power in the region (local authorities and housing, planning and architecture professionals) and beyond (Homes England and the Deputy Head of

Housing for the Greater London Authority).

[Insert Figure 6 near here]

Furthermore, whilst the project did not propose that homeless people can or should 'build the city', by offering a visual and physical statement - a symbol of homeless people's capacity, agency and learning, in the form of a prototype house situated in public space and a programme of events - a wider public narrative of resistance to rising housing precarity, homelessness and austerity was triggered (see Figures 6 and 7). As a result Protohome was at once a space of learning as well as a space of advocacy. Yet these events were also agonistic, as in the case of one event about homelessness, which prompted a difficult discussion into the rise of begging in the city, with one audience member stating that beggars outside her husband's shop were impacting on his business by deterring people from entering. This comment upset and angered members of

Protohome, who themselves had experience of begging, and felt that the serious issues that caused people to beg, such as welfare reform, drug and alcohol dependency and family breakdown, were being undermined. But these tactics, whether catalysed through the creation of a temporary 'house' or a permanent housing development, can create new housing precedents, as well as helping to collapse embedded belief structures about who or what homelessness, and the homeless subject, is. Thus through the act of collectively building and exhibiting the results of our labour in urban space, an alternative set of political tactics was forged - the house became not only a social frame but also a political device.

[Insert Figure 7 near here]

The Limits of PAR in Housing

There are some particular challenges that using PAR within housing brings forth. Whilst barriers for all forms of community produced housing include the acquisition of land and funding, planning, and development support (the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper), there are some particular demands that emerge when undertaking building projects through intense participatory processes.

Participation

Through PAR the initial boundaries, as well as the evaluation of projects, are defined and analysed by the community/group, whilst for Protohome these were defined by myself and the other tutors. This was due to the short timescales involved in the project, but it was also reflective of the demands of working with potentially vulnerable individuals. In order for the true transformative potential of PAR to be realised within housing more open timescales are important. Pain *et al.* (2015) highlight that good co-production requires a long initial phase in order to embed relationships as well as processes of working (this is key when the project can have health and safety risks associated with it), as well as for in depth learning and transformation to take place. Furthermore, within participatory processes of building, unexpected issues may arise which require elongated timescales, which could be a mixture of external factors, such as

funding, planning or insurance, and internal factors, such as issues that arise within groups, like pastoral care. Slow burning projects may also have more transformative potential, as opposed to fleeting projects, where transformation might be difficult to sustain - people might fall back into old routines when the project ends, or when the resources (whether this be people, skills or tools) are no longer available or present (Mrs Kinpaissy, 2008; Pain and Francis, 2003).

As stated above, the physical nature of the project (and building projects in general) meant that forms of professional knowledge and authority were required, so the process was not completely non-hierarchical. Therefore there is a need to be awake to how the participatory process can be improved – to critically evaluate whose voices are

being heard and whose are being left out, and whether people are really being empowered, by undertaking an on-going, cyclical process of reflection. Furthermore, it is also important to highlight that the nature of the participatory process may change depending on the form and structure of the project and this may effect processes of participation as well as power relations. For example forms of competition may arise due to decisions regarding design or governance structures. These are, of course, aspects that were beyond the boundaries of Protohome, yet it is important to note that full housing projects will require more significant decisions which may trigger difficult relations within groups.

Coercion, co-option and hierarchy

Fals-Borda (1987, p. 332) notes that as PAR moves from the micro to the macro

scale external supportive agencies become important, whether these are NGOs, local authorities, funders, charities or activist networks. This is particularly important for housing development to access land, finance and technical support. Further to this, participants may also need wraparound support structures to provide pastoral care and housing advice. Yet when working in partnership there is always a risk of getting co-opted into divergent value structures and hierarchical ways of working. For example recent research on partnerships between Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and housing associations highlights some key concerns for CLTs such as the dilution of a local focus, accountability and democratic decision making processes which stem from differing core

values between partners (Moore, 2016). This may be at odds with the participatory ethics outlined above, and partners may have different guiding assumptions, practices and subjectivities to that of the group. Furthermore, many participatory projects can be prone to co-option because of financial constraints and dependencies (Pieterse, 2008, p. 100). As a result partners may act in coercive ways – offering funding or resources in return for gains in other areas, whether this be publicity or wider business interests. This can lead to ‘coercive conditionality’ (Allen, 2003, p. 121) - the ability to regulate conduct through the threat of negative sanctions. This is seen prominently in the Global South (Larmour, 2002; Stokke, 2013), yet it also occurs elsewhere, particularly when communities lack financial or knowledge resources, or are distant from institutional/political power.

Additionally, large institutions/organisations may also have slow and bureaucratic working practices, at odds with communities (Chatterton, 2015). They may also ‘use’ participation negatively, to control or coerce, as highlighted above. As Pieterse writes with regards to working with local authorities: ‘grassroots projects can be invaluable sites

of experimentation with alternative ways of doing development. State bureaucracies tend to be rigid, hierarchical and conformist institutions. Little room is left for creativity, learning and innovation’ (2008, p. 99). Therefore, working with partners, projects may be expected to speed up processes that need more time for deliberation, use standardised design systems that may not foreground learning, acquire funding from non-ethical sources and become a mouthpiece for certain causes which may result in projects becoming depoliticised.

During Protohome the reflexive approach we took to the process and the activities are at odds with the way that housing is normally developed, and they may not be seen as being absolutely integral to getting housing built efficiently. Furthermore there are inherent difficulties in this more 'open' methodology, whereby the boundaries of the project changed whilst it was in motion. If projects are too open and lack organisation, failure is possible which could have a devastating on vulnerable individuals. Therefore whilst reflexivity is important, there is a balance to be found between stimulating an open and inclusive process, at the same time as making sure that effective controls are in place to ensure project delivery. Yet working intuitively and as non-hierarchically as possible was at the centre of a wider aim to decentre knowledge production and to crack open the dichotomy between the 'professional architect/builder' and the 'amateur user'. This is not to say that more institutionally defined approaches are devoid of learning, sociality, laughter and fun, but instead participatory approaches *actively make space* for these within their structures and processes. Consequently, approaches must be context specific, avoiding standard project 'blueprints'.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to highlight how, through an attention to the epistemological and methodological approaches of participatory action research (PAR), more equitable processes of producing housing can be envisaged which are open to

more equitable processes of co-produced housing can be harnessed which are open to those with little so-called social, economic or knowledge capital and who may be in housing and/or employment need. Participation in housing is gaining increasing attention with the development of community-led housing (CLH) in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. However, much discourse has focused on specific governance, financial and organisational models, and has paid less attention to the mechanics of participation within them. Furthermore, many precedents within the CLH sector emerge from individuals and groups that are not the victims of housing precarity, and therefore the potentials for CLH to be a tool to bring forth more equitable housing futures for those in housing need has been under-represented in academic literature and under-realised in practice.

Through the example of a participatory build project – Protohome – the paper has sought to create a tentative frame to begin to conceptualise and critically analyse participation within housing processes. Whilst PAR has had little attention within the field of housing production, this paper has highlighted that processes of design and build which are grounded in the practices and philosophies of PAR can be a tool for learning, skills building, the development of confidence and the flourishing of sociality. Importantly this is also a politicised process that has transformative potential for participants, including the development of a critical consciousness on personal pasts and presents. Unlike other

forms of practice, PAR overtly aims to challenge the ethics of knowledge production and draw attention to the power relationships within the participatory processes. Within housing this means questioning how knowledge in house building is normatively produced and how this process can be opened up to new groups.

Furthermore it draws attention to existing and experiential knowledge of participants, as well as tacit practices of learning through making. This involves reformulating the role of the expert builder, joiner or architect - not as distant professional but as catalyst and enabler.

However, there are some key challenges associated with bringing PAR into processes of housing. Because housing often requires partnerships with outside actors and agencies such as housing associations, funders, local authorities, charities, developers and contractors who may have divergent working practices and ethics, the participatory ethics and reflexive working processes of projects may be co-opted and diluted. Furthermore, it is a challenge to facilitate projects aiming to be non-hierarchical, whereby each voice is valued. These working practices might be slower and messier. As a result, this is not a process that can be facilitated in all cases – it may only fully work in pioneering cases of housing development. Yet the CLH sector is perfectly placed to bring forth projects that confront increasing housing precarity, which are open to, and controlled by, those with the least power in society. This requires the sector to be bolder – to fully assess the added social value of participatory approaches, to connect up to broader social movements fighting for access to land and housing and to bring forth projects which, whilst they may be messy and complex, actively aid people in housing need to have more control over their lives and livelihoods. Whilst more research is needed into governance models, land

acquisition, building typologies, housing management and funding structures (issues that were beyond the scope of Protohome and which are likely to be context specific), by

focusing in depth on the mechanics of participation in the design and build process through the philosophies of PAR, this paper provides some key tools to create a more critical and politicised CLH sector.

Word count: 11,275

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jo Gooding, Rachel Pain and Ruth Raynor for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also to the three anonymous referees for their generous and helpful comments.

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under Grant Number: ES/J500082/1, the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account Fund and The Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at Durham University.

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Julia Heslop is an artist and postdoctoral research fellow in Architecture at Newcastle University. The potentials for deep participation in (re)creating the urban realm, and specifically housing, are at the centre of her research and practice and she often works in collaborative, slow ways with groups and communities. She uses her work to ask questions regarding land and property ownership, housing precarity, urban planning and local democracy.

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Figures

Figure 1. Protohome on site. Credit: John Hipkin.

Figure 2. Learning joinery techniques in the Crisis workshop. Credit: The author.

Figure 3. Group members learning whilst building Protohome. Credit: John Hipkin.

Figure 4. The dimensional grid frame of the Segal method. Credit: John Hipkin.

Figure 5. Collaborative building processes on site. Credit: John Hipkin.

Figure 6. Protohome open to the public. Credit: The author.

Figure 7. Opening up conversation into housing issues. Credit: The author.