

# TEN THINGS I LEARNED FROM AN ACADEMY OF URBANISM EVENT ON HOUSING HELD IN EINDHOVEN

NOTE: STATS HEALTH WARNING – all this is based on notes taken at the time so don't quote them as gospel!

## 1. EINDHOVEN GAVE UP ON BEING BORING AND NOW IT'S BOOMING – BUT IS ITS SUCCESS TRANSFERABLE?

From boring company town to Berlin in miniature...

Eindhoven was a Philips company town and Philips was the biggest company in the world at one stage. Then it down-sized, moved its HQ to Amsterdam and its production to cheap labour countries. 50,000 jobs went.

Now it's a buzzing boom town with major housing demand.

Some factors...

- It didn't do it through piles of boring / by the numbers / same as the next city, strategy documents it did it through a combination of Netherlands pragmatism (PUTP 'pick up the phone' and regular dialogue between the key players (the 'triple helix') of council, university, private sector - and an adventurous spirit (letting people try things)
- It was no doubt helped by the fact that it is a cosily sized city and it has a history of innovation and making things (eg Philips)
- It guilt tripped money out of a departing Philips to pay for a new tech campus on edge of town
- Meanwhile the vast Philips manufacturing site (not far off the city centre) was opened up to the creative sector to see what happens and now that's taken off too. This is part of a wider shift that's going on in the place making world - from having your edge of town tech campus to your in-town innovation district



- It encourages a culture of collaboration, open-ness and sharing – this extends to the open source city logo which has been adapted for all sorts of uses including citizens tattooing it on themselves
- It tells its story very well and its marketing of itself as a city of the future is effective – e.g. we are a ‘brainport’, the smartest 50 square kilometres in the world, the place where the right brain and the left brain come together
- You want to make money in a gold rush? Sell shovels not look for gold. Eindhoven is a hotspot for computer chip manufacture
- It is open to the world – not many places finish off their presentation by actively encouraging you to move there!
- It’s an example of an ‘everything you know is wrong’ theory that rust belt towns can become the smartest and most successful places in the world  
<https://www.amazon.com/Smartest-Places-Earth-Rustbelts-Innovation/dp/1610394356>



Now the challenge is how do you keep the people from the Philips generation on board with the transition? How do you meet housing need in a sustainable and inclusive way? How do you manage development and the potential for more city centre towers without damaging the buzzy / cosy quality of life that drew people there in first place? How do you embrace the realities and implications of the ‘super diversity’ that is the future of Eindhoven and other successful cities too?

## **2. COMMODIFICATION OF HOUSING IS THE BIG PROBLEM...BUT A FIGHT BACK IS UNDER WAY**

Hyper-commodification of housing emerged again and again as the big challenge / enemy. All over the world the same things are happening as a result of globalisation, financial innovation and deregulation which is that freebooting international capital is investing in speculative housing in a way which is making housing in most successful places not just unaffordable to those on lower incomes but now for those on middle incomes as well. Gentrification then also becomes a business model because you need an area to become more hipster / gentrified in order to jack the rents up. And not much point in congratulating ourselves in building more homes if they then stand empty for one reason or another.

Some countries / cities already have mechanisms to dampen down commodification of housing such as restrictions on volumes of housing units you can own, a requirement to live in the property. Some are looking at bringing in new dampening measures.

The other global trend is that usually cities look to intervene to look after the housing interests of those on low incomes – we now need policies that will also address the needs of middle income households.

The challenge in UK is a) we don't have much in the way of existing dampening measures on speculation and b) in UK for many people their house is a wealth repository (both to pass on and as alternative to inadequate social security – particularly for care in old age). We have a lot of housing problems – other depressing stats are available but there are these for starters - one million unfit homes, one million people on housing waiting lists, 150,000 homeless in one way or another. We have struggling renters (40% of private tenants spend over 40% of their after-tax incomes on rent), old people who can't afford upkeep of their homes but need it as security against future care needs, struggling buyers (whose finances are on a knife edge), frustrated renters (who can't afford a house). A lot of angry fed up people. We also have eight very profitable house builders (market capitalisation of 24bn) who do very nicely out of the status quo – and they build 80 per cent of new homes.

Another challenge is what we mean by affordable housing in the UK. If affordable housing means 85% of cost of something that is completely unaffordable it is still unaffordable.

World cities are now taking action in different ways – even those which already have dampers on speculation. Properties went up in cost by 75% in Auckland in four years so they have now taken steps to prevent remote ownership from overseas. Berlin is exercising powers to buy up formerly private flats. In Dublin not one square inch is to

be sold to private developers for the next five years. Many of these measures aim to 're-localise' the local housing market. Things are moving in London too:

- planning to bring forward proposals for rent control
- making case for council tax for empty homes to be much higher
- pledged 10,000 new council homes in the next four years
- fast tracking of new housing developments is linked to threshold of 35% affordable housing with aim to raise that to 50%
- big programme of house building by TfL

Land ownership also becoming an issue with the May government moving in the direction of supporting the accumulation of larger sites which is a helpful start.

### **3. FROM LAKE GENEVA TO THE FINLAND STATION**

There are some cities / countries (Zurich, Wien, Finland, Singapore) which emerged as good practice as places which are more affordable for lower and middle income people.

- Singapore – where the land is publicly owned, housing is public and much effort is made to ensure that housing there is a mix of ethnicity.
- 'You can't work out somebody's income in Wien from finding out where they live'
- Finland is also the only country in EU where homelessness is decreasing. Helsinki – where much of the land is in public hands and one in seven of population lives in social housing. They use courtyards within housing developments and measures to ensure that schools have mixed intake from different income levels to help ensure social housing is mixed.



- Zurich – where there are a lot of cooperative housing developments

#### 4. BUT IN SOME CITIES AFFORDABILITY IS NOT THE MAIN PROBLEM...

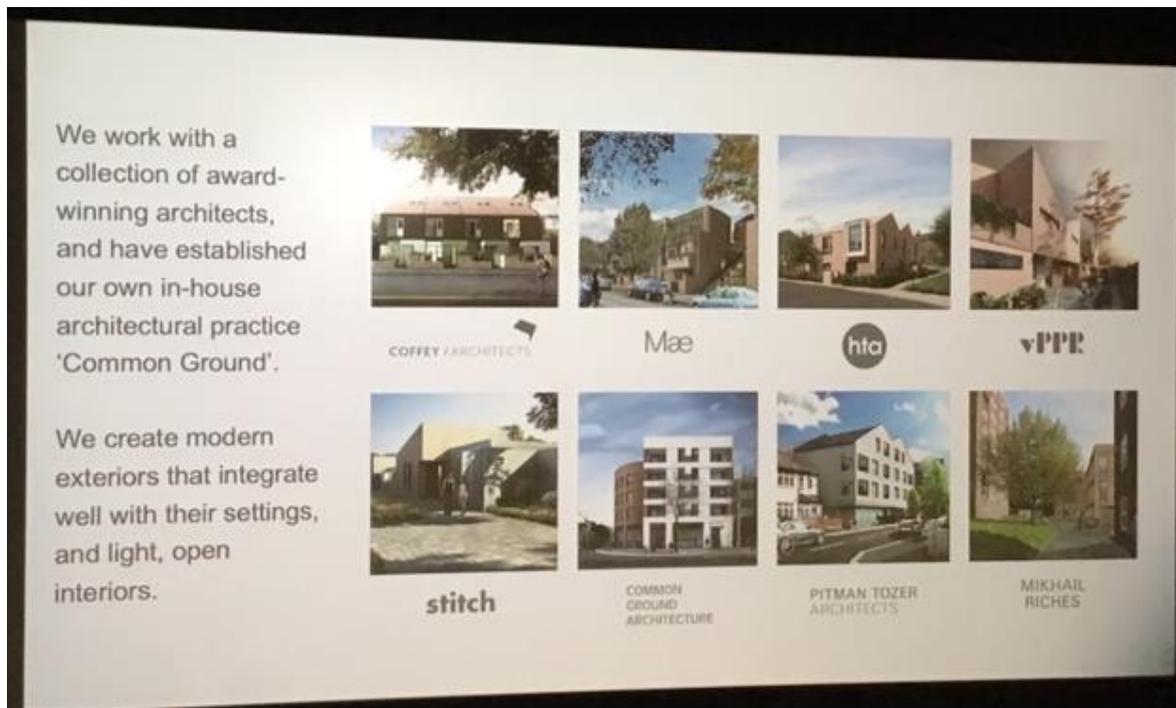
For example in Rotterdam there was lots of affordable social housing (though prices have been going up recently though) – Glasgow too.

Glasgow is working with partners on some big Joint Ventures where land has been accumulated for some transformational developments.

#### 5. NOT ALL BAD IN THE UK SHOCKER

The May government belatedly realised that putting further turbo chargers on the financialisation of housing is not going to help given that housing availability and cost is now such a hot political issue. So they have reversed recent policies on public housebuilding, further reducing public and private sector tenants' rights and so on.

In this context more councils are now setting up their own house building companies. The Croydon one ([brick by brick](#)) looked good. 75% of local authorities have now set up their own development companies.



Housing Associations too are big players and patient investors – with overlapping goals with transport authorities.

## 6. INFILL ('URBAN DENTISTRY') OPPORTUNITIES AROUND TRANSPORT HUBS

There are lots of overlooked opportunities for new housing in bits and bobs of available land in urban areas – it's just that the volume house builders can't be bothered with them. However, housing associations and local authority owned companies can (as Croydon shows). No doubt therefore there is lots of untapped potential on transport related / close to public transport land in the city regions. Brick by Brick sent people round on bicycles looking for potential sites and found many more than council surveying department said there were.

## 7. PUBLIC HOUSING CAN DRAG AN AREA UP - NOT DOWN

Some great examples in Eindhoven...



But also increasingly in the UK too...

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jun/20/council-housing-its-back-its-booming-and-this-time-its-beautiful>

## 8. THE DETAIL IS COMPLEX

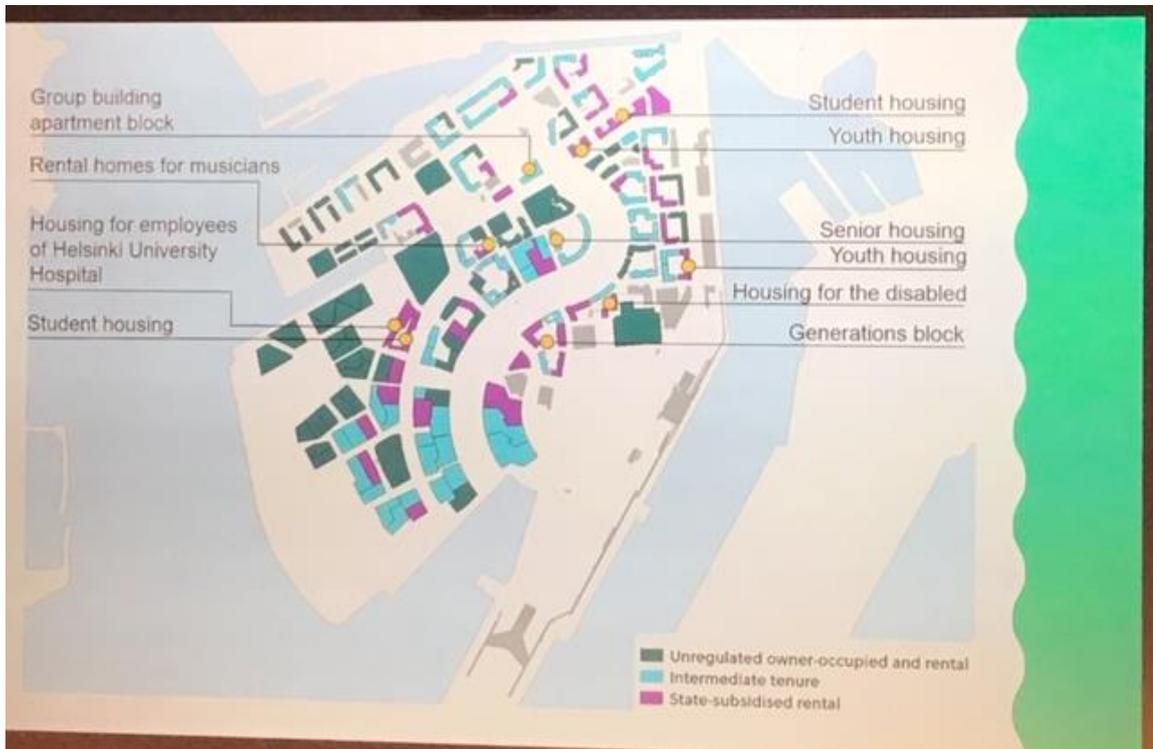
Different cities and countries have different (and often very complex) arrangements around tenure and payment for housing. However cooperative housing is more common in some of the countries which are more revered on housing (ie where a group of people co-fund to some degree a housing development and run it collectively on a not-for-profit basis).

## 9. THIS IS NOT MY BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

Housing in Britain tends to be very conservative in the way it looks and the way it functions. Partly because the big volume builders make a fortune out of the status quo and knocking out the same (often fault-ridden) catalogue rabbit hutch / dolls house designs everywhere. Given the way society is changing (including the shift from ownership and atomisation to sharing and trying to reduce loneliness) there are indications that new formats for abodes are being tried in more places – with a key driver being towards formats that promote the social, ‘the commons’ and the democratic but also more choice and less conformity in dwelling form, function and design.

OK – so what are you on about?

- Check out this ‘familyscraper’  
[https://www.vanbergenkolpa.nl/en/16\\_family\\_scraper\\_de\\_maasbode.html](https://www.vanbergenkolpa.nl/en/16_family_scraper_de_maasbode.html)
- Or this - where you can reconfigure the walls when you feel like it  
<https://www.dezeen.com/2016/10/18/video-garden-house-caspar-schols-eindhoven-netherlands-wooden-pavilion-shed-movie/>
- Or these UK housing developments which aim to design loneliness out  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/uk/inside-homes-built-help-fight-uks-loneliness-epidemic/>
- Eindhoven has some short term housing lets for people specifically for people with a need for it – such as the recently divorced. It also has a scheme where social housing tenants pay less rent if they also undertake community activities (such as younger people looking in on older people or older people supervising children) All about building up ‘social sustainability’ or to put it another way ‘sociable housing not social housing’.
- One of the new housing developments in Helsinki has areas specifically allocated for different types of people – including musicians.



- In Switzerland there's a move to 2000 watt housing. 2000 watts being the energy we should be using per year per head on environmental grounds. [https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/portal/en/index/portraet\\_der\\_stadt\\_zuerich/2000-watt\\_society.html](https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/portal/en/index/portraet_der_stadt_zuerich/2000-watt_society.html)
- Also mixed use back in vogue. We saw new estates in inner city area of Eindhoven with new retail units facing road where rents were peppercorn to get life into the area and to get new traders going – and you could see it was working. Not just cafes and retail either – one room set aside for kids to do their homework. Brick by Brick also doing more mixed developments.

## 10. PRINT YOUR OWN HOUSE TO YOUR OWN DESIGN

We saw a machine that can 'print' the concrete parts which will make bespoke buildings and houses. At present it's printing the parts for a bridge. Because it's being done by a computer it is good at making sophisticated geometric shapes and there were only two people needed to operate it (one at the computer screen and the other watching the machine). You can sense if the operation was speeded up and scaled up then you could also be printing out buildings at scale. Although it's probably best suited to certain types of concrete buildings and I don't have the expertise to what extent there's a big future in this or whether it's a clickbait gadget.





## Final thoughts...

On housing every country is to some extent a prisoner of its past and in the UK that past has put us in a difficult and moribund place. However, at the same time change is here. The political damage and popular dissatisfaction that extreme financialisation of housing is causing is also now placing limits on further commodification. This has also helped contribute to the comeback of public, social and sociable housing. All of which means there are big opportunities out there to do everything at the same time in creating great places to live, which are both environmentally and sociably sustainable, and, of course, transit oriented.

**Jonathan Bray**