



Housing – A Critical Perspective.

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Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

1. Paper / Proposal Title: "Yet another apartment block...?!" A critique of housing provision in cities, and qualities that make urban houses desirable.

2. Format: Written paper

3. Author(s) Name: Dr Charlie Smith

4. University or Company Affiliation: Liverpool John Moores University

5. Abstract (300 words):

Over the last two decades city-living has transformed many UK urban areas beyond recognition, and urban dwelling has become an ingrained part of our culture. However, with developers providing woefully limited choice, options to live in these places are restricted to those whose needs are catered for by a very small range of dwelling types; for example, less than 2 per cent of dwellings in central Manchester aren't flats. Consequently both demographic diversity and variety in the urban fabric are being severely undermined, much to their detriment.

Cities are desirable places because of their rich tapestry, and flats are an essential thread composing that weave. This presentation argues, however, that the types of dwelling being built for a city's population should be broadened, thus addressing a Hobson's choice of one- and two-bedroom apartments and student flats. In doing so, the urban grain will be richer, there will be more choice for those already residing in urban places, and other demographics may be attracted to live there.

After identifying the characteristics that make houses distinct as a typology – such as the disposition of private outdoor space and the configuration of thresholds between public and private realms – these attributes are analysed in a discussion about the qualities that make houses appropriate in the particular context of urban areas. These theoretical concepts are illustrated by exemplary precedents, recent and past, which are dissected to illustrate their key qualities. Collectively these offer principles to consider in future urban house designs.

Building houses in cities is contentious, however, and plagued with challenges such as scale, contextuality and affordability; indeed, houses have been built within cities in dreadfully inappropriate ways. Often, the presentation shows, this is a combination of poor design and planning; cautionary tales over matters such as density and massing are, therefore, also told.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr Charlie Smith

Senior Lecturer, Liverpool John Moores University, Architecture

Dr Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Liverpool John Moores University. In the both the undergraduate and postgraduate studios he has run design and research projects dealing specifically with contemporary housing design in urban areas. He has pioneered new approaches to research that incorporate student project work as a central element within the methodology.

His doctoral thesis studied ways in which to dramatically improve the sustainability of housing in UK cities. In this work the term “sustainability” encompassed a broad church, including issues such as affordability and space standards. All of these factors were identified as interconnected, and the thesis proposed that they must be considered holistically, and never in isolation.

Dr Smith has also worked as a consultant on a range of progressive housing projects, working collaboratively with architectural practices. This work has included winning and shortlisted projects in national and international housing design competitions.