

Cities, Communities and Homes: Is the Urban Future Livable?

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

Room to swing a kid? An exploratory study into end-user engagement with 'spatially constrained' UK family homes

- **Format:**

Conference Presentation

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

At a time when UK house building is once again gaining momentum, and 'Garden Villages', 'Garden Cities' and 'Eco Towns' feature on government and construction sector agendas, this study questions to what extent 'spatially constrained' new housing developments are a socially sustainable solution. A significant number of studies (Munro and Madigan (1999), Evans and Hartwich (2005), Roberts-Hughes (2011), RIBA (2013), Morgan and Cruikshank (2014)) have highlighted both the high percentage of 'under-sized' new UK properties compared to other developed countries, and the extent of consumer dissatisfaction with the space on offer. Given that the option of 'upsizing' has become financially challenging for many families, the question must be asked in what ways the available 'spatially constrained' housing stock directly impacts on the life

course of their inhabitants, and to what extent wider social and cultural changes are the result.

Through an iterative process of data capture this study renders valuable insights into family user engagement with the housing on offer. Primary research includes the narrative interviewing of ten couples in the early family life stage, living in or close to Oxford, and inhabiting homes of differing sizes. It is shown that constrained spaces and neighborhoods do have a strong influence on cultural and social practices, and can affect the timing of life stage transitions.

Also emerging from this study is an insight from the end-user which challenges the viability of the current industry model of providing small houses with dense internal layouts on small plots. Instead, the participants of this study demonstrate a need for a different, and arguably more sustainable, vision of a family home. Such homes should allow for a staged spatial expansion of the house, enabling the longer-term integration of individuals and their future families within a 'locale', thereby facilitating sustainable, vibrant local communities.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Tobias Vokuhl

Tobias gained international construction experience in Germany, Israel and the UK, where he now resides. Prior to studying for his MSc in Project Management in the Built Environment at Oxford Brookes University Tobias worked as a craftsman and consecutively as a site manager for Reading based conservation specialist McCurdy & Co. For a number of years he carried out timber frame conservation and reconstruction works for, among others, The Globe Theatre Trust, Historic Royal Palaces and English Heritage. Tobias graduated from his course with Distinction in June 2015, winning several CIOB and RICS awards for his academic achievements. These included the 2015 CIOB International Innovation and Research Highly Commended Award for his MSc dissertation, for which Tobias conducted in depth qualitative research into the impact of 'spatially constrained' housing on young families in and around Oxford. Tobias now works as a Contracts Manager for Beard Construction in Oxford, delivering capital projects in the educational, healthcare, research and heritage sectors. He continues to maintain a research interest in sustainable construction, planning policy, and housing.

Dr Mark Austin

Mark is a cross disciplinarian, having lectured both on cultural studies and construction technology. He is currently a Principal Lecturer in Construction at Oxford Brookes University specializing in the critical evaluation of advanced construction technologies including the use of sustainable technologies to reduce carbon footprint of buildings.

His research interests include the application of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital for the understanding of the uses of spaces within the built environment. In particular, Mark has explored the meanings and values individuals attached to buildings including both the uptake of 'green technologies' within the home, and the creation of socially sustainable urban environments.