



Summary of the International Collaborative Housing Conference Stockholm 5-9 May 2010

The conference attracted more than 150 participants from 20 countries. Those arriving early could enjoy dinners in 9 different cohousing units in the Stockholm area. Eleven housing units opened their guest rooms for conference participants. The day before the conference there were study tours to 5 cohousing units, which presented their situation and organized guided tours to common spaces and apartments. There were 11 plenum speakers. All of them kept to their allocated time, and all wrote papers for the Book of Proceedings. All 16 planned workshops were actually carried out. Each of them had been prepared in advance by an appointed chair and a secretary, and all 16 produced reports of high interest after the conference. More than 20 voluntaries took care of registration, payment, exhibition spaces and other practical matters. A conference dinner was held at the campus. The guests were entertained by the Stockholm Improvisation Theatre.

The conference was created as a forum for exchange of experiences and ideas. As such, it was not organized to formulate and adopt conclusions. Nevertheless, many good conclusions and recommendations are found in different conference documents.

Recommendations from the conference

A common theme was the need to facilitate the sharing – internationally and locally – of both theoretical and practical developments. *Translations into English of texts* produced in other languages would be a first priority. Such a project would gain much from international coordination and joint efforts to get the necessary funding.

Improved access to *systematized experiences from different countries* is highly valuable for research. Among key themes *comparative process studies* was mentioned; the documentation and analysis of cohousing projects from start to implementation (or failure). Such work should pave the way for what workshop 6 called a *draft charter for cohousing*.

In line with this proposal, *a catalogue of design models* from different countries, and their respective relation to social, economic and environmental dimensions of collective life, should be a useful tool also in contacts with politicians and developers.

Given the plethora of terms in use to describe a wide variety of housing projects, it would seem worthwhile to *assemble terms in use in different languages*, identify their meanings and try to create a *categorization of cohousing projects* based on some general criteria. As an end product, this might lead to a set of terms in English suitable for respective broad category.

Final ceremony of the conference, taking place in the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm.

Two criteria need to be given much more attention: the (potential or real) *economy of living together*, and the environmental gains offered. That radical change in material consumption soon will be required seems beyond doubt, but few workable ways to change the behaviour of market actors have yet been





Representatives of cohousing organisations met in the cohousing unit Färdknäppen just after the conference.

devised. To *economize* is a term with many dimensions. Neither the individual firm competing on the market, nor the individual household on its own, may be capable of much change; the collective – whether an organization of business operators or a group of households – stands much stronger in this respect. Graham Meltzer's accounts (in the Book of Proceedings) from the Scottish community Findhorn demonstrate what is possible, given optimum conditions.

Cohousing network meeting

Before and after the conference representatives from various countries met to discuss possible cooperation. Altogether 16 persons from 10 countries met in this way. Minutes are available from the two meetings (contact: dickurba@gmail.com). The following points are worth mentioning:

Internet

Already before the conference Peter Bakker of Centraal Wonen, Netherlands, had formed a *joint cohousing website*. It is available at: <http://www.lvcw.nl/cohousingAssociations.php>. It was decided to announce this link and to develop it further. It was proposed that articles and other information be posted on this website, to create a search engine, and also to use Wikipedia. Responsible: Peter Bakker, lvcw@lvcw.nl and Roland Kums of Belgian Samenhuizen network, roland@samenuizen.be.

Ben Brix from Germany (mail@ben-brix.de) offered to collect information and an image of each participant in order to provide more information for the existing email list of conference participants. Within a month from the conference about 50 persons used this opportunity. The presentations are available at: <http://www.cohousing2010.se/eng/>.

Persuading Developers

It was proposed to compile a document with arguments showing that cohousing is good business for housing companies and private developers. John Fletcher of Swedish Kollektivhus NU is getting a report from French researchers that include government studies, and he would make this available. Responsible for this task are Mark Westcombe (m.westcombe@lancaster.ac.uk) and Sarah Berger (sarahanneberger@gmail.com) from the UK Cohousing Network, together with John Fletcher (john.fletcher@tersen.se) of Swedish Kollektivhus NU.

One of the workshops of the conference discussing the theme of how to construct an appropriate process from a vision to moving in.

Consulting Services to Groups

It was proposed to work out proposals how to facilitate the relationship between the developer, the cohousing group and various consultants. Mark Westcombe volunteered to coordinate this task in collaboration with the 'developer persuasion' group.



Collaborative Housing Literature List

Several national cohousing organizations have lists of books, papers and other types of research about cohousing. It was considered useful to compile the information, to make summaries of what is actually known about cohousing and to make this available through the existing websites. Dick Urban Vestbro (dickurba@gmail.com) of Swedish Kollektivhus NU was asked to carry out these tasks in collaboration with Dorit Fromm (frommdorit@gmail.com), Diana Margolis and Lisa Polis.

International Research

It was proposed that existing research be used to find out which aspects of cohousing that need further research. A group of Swedish researchers have already made a compilation with this purpose, but it could be elaborated. Lene Schmidt (lene.schmidt@nibr.no) of the Norwegian Institute of Building and Planning Research is applying for funding to conduct cross-country research. She is doing this in collaboration with Roseanna Gutman (rossana.gutmann@wohnbund.at), Dick Urban Vestbro (dickurba@gmail.com), Els de Jong (edejong@wono.nl), Dorit Fromm (frommdorit@gmail.com), Anne Glass (aglass@geron.uga.edu), and Liisa Horelli (Liisa.Horelli@tkk.fi).

Related conferences

Seven European organizations have been funded from the EU for a project on collaborative housing. The task includes construction of a website, a cohousing glossary and a brochure. The project is co-ordinated by *experimentcity* in Berlin. Website: <http://experimentcity.net/excity-europe/programme>.

Samenhuizen vzw is a Belgian social profit organisation for intentional/collaborative communities that was founded in 2000 (www.samenhuizen.be). It operates mainly in the Dutch-speaking, northern half of Belgium and has successfully applied for funding from the Flemish government. This subsidy will allow *Samenhuizen* to hire one full time employee for the period 2011-2015. It has agreed to host another international cohousing conference within this period. Responsible persons are: Luk Jonckheere (luk@samenuizen.be) and Roland Kums (roland@samenuizen.be).

The ecovillage of Findhorn in Scotland (<http://www.findhorn.org/>) will be hosting the next conference of *International Community Studies Association* (ICSA) in 2013. It may be possible to combine this with a cohousing conference. Contact person: Graham Meltzer (graham.meltzer@findhorn.org).

Bus tours

It was also proposed to organise bus tours to cohousing projects in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and other countries. No decision was taken about who would do this.

Evaluation of the conference - Participant's views

An evaluation form was sent to the 150 participants in the International Collaborative Housing Conference and one third returned it filled in. The predominating sense in these evaluations is the importance of meeting likeminded persons, and of being able to compare different models of living together. Some expressed a wish to have more time for just meeting people and for workshops, even at the cost of fewer keynote speakers.

One of the most valued aspects of the conference was the ample time for coffee and lunch breaks, at which many useful ties could be established.

Respondents were asked to evaluate specific aspects of the conference



according to a scale from 1 (bad) to 5 (best). The results were:

1. Participants mainly found out about the conference through their own networks.
2. They found the advance information OK, although some found it a bit “scattered in bits and pieces” (average evaluation: 4.0);
3. They liked the Cohousing suppers on Wednesday (average 4.2);
4. The Cohousing study tour on Thursday was “best in show” (average 4.6)
5. Participants liked the key-note speakers and the broad range of subjects they covered (average: 4.0), although everyone seems to have their specific favourites.
6. The Friday workshops (average: 3.2) had their critics: “too much like a lecture”, “no time for discussion”, “too much focus on seniors”.
7. The Saturday workshops were better received (average: 4.2).
8. Those who needed help with accommodation received that help (average: 4.2).
9. Participants liked the lunches and coffee breaks (average evaluation: 4.4)
10. The Saturday night dinner was another “best in show” (average 4.6)
11. The registration desk seems to have been fine (average evaluation: 4.2).
12. The things participants liked best were: “meeting people”, “meeting enthusiasm and diversity”, “the cohousing tour on Thursday”.
13. The most common reply to what might have been better was “nothing”. Some felt that there was “too much focus on seniors”, “too few Danes”, “not enough time”.
14. The expectations of future information focuses on getting the Conference Report and on “Where will the next conference will take place – and when?”

Two questions were addressed to speakers and chair-people in the workshops. To these there are far fewer answers. They emphasize the need for a very thorough planning work before the conference, and also indicate that speaker services during the conference were OK.



Some of the plenary speakers at the conference. From above left: Albrecht Göschel, Dick Urban Vestbro and Bertil Egerö, Margrethe Kähler, Barbro Westerholm, Göran Cars and Kerstin Kärnekull.