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Collective Custom Build is a web-based advocacy tool that makes the case for developing Collective Custom Build as part of a more diverse housing market in the UK. It uses an animated narrative to curate key research findings, revealing them as peelbacks at key points in its argument.

Collective Custom Build is part of the *Motivating Collective Custom Build* practice-based research project within the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded *Home Improvements Knowledge Exchange* based at the University of Sheffield. *Motivating Collective Custom build* is led jointly by the University of Sheffield School of Architecture, Ash Sakula Architects and Design for Homes.

ACTIVE INDUSTRY

COLLECTIVE CUSTOM BUILD IS AN ACTIVE AND IDENTIFIABLE INDUSTRY

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Summary

Although often described as ‘niche’ and perceived as small and somewhat professionally disparate, Collective Custom Build is part of a growing ‘self-build’ industry that is established, identifiable and active - and that already contributes over £3billion annually to the national economy (Building Societies Association, 2012, p. 3), building approximately 7% of all new housing in the UK (Homebuilding & Renovating Market Research, 2013a).

The National Self Build Association (NaSBA) and Self Build Portal¹ provide the sector with a recognisable industry body and common point of access for information, whilst significant sectors of the construction industry - such as offsite manufacturing² and the ‘lending landscape’ of banks, building societies and mortgage providers³ - already see Collective Custom Build as an important emerging market worthy of attention.

As the Collective Custom Build sector of the self-provided housing industry develops, key stakeholders from the house-building and general construction industries are forming new partnerships, innovating across sectors to share risk and work mutually to respond to emerging opportunities.

¹ See www.nasba.org.uk and www.selfbuildportal.org.uk

² The ‘*Offsite Housing Review*’ published by the Construction Industry Council (Miles and Whitehouse, 2013) makes a number of recommendations for ‘*building better houses, faster*’ (Ibid. 2013, p. 2), and defines ‘offsite’ as ‘*involving substantial factory manufacturing intervention to add to project value*’ (Ibid. 2013, p. 4). As counter-point to the common perception of the house-building industry as resistant to change, it points out that a number of offsite solutions are already extensively used within the house-building industry, and makes significant reference to both the opportunities presented to the sector by the ‘self-build’ market, and the need to diversify the skill-base of the UK’s construction workforce with regard to workmanship and higher environmental performance standards.

³ Significant recent research into the role of and opportunities for financial institutions with regard to self-build, published by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, was commissioned by Lloyds Banking Group and given a high-profile Parliamentary Launch, hosted by Richard Bacon MP, Chair of the newly formed All-Party Group on Self-Build. See ‘*Build-it-yourself? - Understanding the changing landscape of the UK self-build market*’ (Wallace et al., 2013).

The National Self Build Association (NaSBA) and the Self Build Portal

The National Self Build Association (NaSBA) represent an active and accessible industry body, actively engaging in advocacy and research to support the development of the sector.

Current industry initiatives include:

National Self Build Week – the first of which took place in London in 2013, in partnership with the large construction industry trade show, Grand Designs Live (NaSBA, 2013a).

Self Build Portal – an industry-funded, web-based, central point of access about how to understand promote and develop self-provided housing (Self Build Portal, 2013; Homebuilding & Renovating, 2013, p. 10).

Campaigning / Publication – a series of campaigning and educational articles in key self-build magazines, for instance on the impact of the Community Infrastructure Levy (Homebuilding & Renovating, 2013, p. 10).

Offsite Manufacturing and Collective Custom Build

Some sources draw particular attention to the opportunities afforded by advances in offsite manufacture to de-risk individual and collective self-build schemes from the point of view of lenders and development partners, and grow the Collective Custom Build sector by establishing supply chains orientated towards the needs of collective custom builders. Offsite-manufactured 'flat-pack' homes are described by various sources as offering cost-savings and faster build times, as well as allowing greater control over build quality, which in turn can lead to increased environmental performance and longevity, and reduced occurrence of defects (Bomken et al., 2013; Wainwright, 2013; Stevens, 2013; NaSBA, 2013b; Parvin et al., 2011; Owen et al., 2011; ArchiHaus, 2013; BoKlok, 2013; ModCell, 2013; Urban Self Build, 2013 and others).

The '*Offsite Housing Review*' published by the Construction Industry Council (Miles and Whitehouse, 2013) makes a number of recommendations for '*building better houses, faster*' (Ibid. 2013, p. 2), and defines 'offsite' as '*involving substantial factory manufacturing intervention to add to project value*' (Ibid. 2013, p. 4). As counter-point to the common perception of the house-building industry as resistant to change, Miles and Whitehouse point out that:

"... a number of offsite solutions are already extensively used within the house-building industry. For example almost all new low-rise homes will be built using factory manufactured truss-rafters for the construction of pitched roofs. Similarly there is ubiquitous use of factory-finished windows and doors and there is, of course, significant use of factory manufactured timber-frame walling systems of various forms. Accordingly there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the house-building industry is receptive to the use of offsite construction solutions where it is in their commercial interests to do so."

(Miles and Whitehouse, 2013, p. 4)

The report also makes significant reference to both the opportunities presented to the sector by the 'self-build' market, and the need to diversify the skill-base of the UK's construction workforce with regard to workmanship and higher environmental performance standards.

"With volume house-builders predicting they could increase production only to around 100,000 new homes per year using traditional methods of site-based construction and acknowledgement that the traditional skill-base of the UK construction workforce is in long term decline, there is a clear opportunity to develop new technological solutions to housing delivery that also diversify the labour market."

(Ibid. 2013, p. 4)

Offsite manufacturing of housing is already well-established in a wide range of other countries. Japanese prefabricated house manufacturers, for example are described by Parvin et al. as more like electronics or car manufacturers⁴ in the degree of quality and customisation offered (2011, p. 53). An established 'home manufacturing' sector is also widely cited as a critical factor in the success of large-scale, self-provided housing development at the Homeruskwartier in Almere, Netherlands, as well as in much of the rest of Western Europe, Scandinavia, and North America (Miles and Whitehouse, 2013, p. 15), with established offsite home manufacturing industries typically found in any housing market that has an established self-provided housing sector. A recent proposal in the Dutch city of Nijmegen seeks to prototype innovative working partnerships between architects and 'kit-home manufacturers' to develop volume-build models of affordable housing (Wainwright, 2013).

In the UK, the BoKlok prefabricated system offered by IKEA has the potential to offer high environmental performance at an affordable price, but so far has only been used in speculative development (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 53), whilst the Low-Impact Living Affordable Community (LILAC) self-providing group has successfully used the ModCell system (ModCell, 2013; Roberts et al., 2010) of straw-bale and timber panels - fabricated in a locally-deployed 'flying-factory'- to construct their Collective Custom Build scheme in Leeds (LILAC, 2013).

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⁴ According to Parvin et al. some companies are indeed electronic or car manufacturers who have diversified into the housing market (Parvin et al., 2011, p. 53).

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This excerpt is taken from www.collectivecustombuild.org and forms a single element of a wider research study. Please visit the website or contact us at collectivecustombuild@sheffield.ac.uk for more information.



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