Against the ‘tyranny’ of single-family dwelling: insights from Christiania at 40

Helen Jarvis*

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, Daysh Building, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE17RU, UK

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Ownership of a single-family dwelling remains the dominant aspiration in market-led economies. In a hyper-privatised landscape, it is widely assumed that people will not share housing except in extraordinary circumstances. There is nevertheless a long and rich history of countercultural groups who imagine and practise alternative forms of shared housekeeping and collaborative dwelling. This article draws on first-hand observations of daily life from the countercultural community of Christiania, in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, at a critical moment in a 40-year history of state-threatened ‘normalization’. Christiania is an intriguing lens through which to re-imagine affordable, adaptable, gender democratic housing and urban structure: it reveals how sharing, mutuality and innovation intersect at multiple scales of homemaking and community governance. These insights are relevant for provoking new thinking about dwelling and mutuality in the context of a deepening crisis in housing provision and access across Europe.

**Keywords:** Christiania; sharing; housing; family; sustainability; care

Introduction

Ownership of a single-family dwelling remains the aspiration of a majority of households in market-led economies around the world. In this hyper-privatised landscape, individuals and families struggle to ‘balance’ or reconcile income-generating activities with the rest of life, under constant pressure to coordinate multiple time-limited tasks. Yet, the notion that individuals and families might lessen their scheduling burden or reduce the need for as much income generation by pooling their efforts and resources, is typically met with suspicion and fear. As Hemmens, Hoch, and Carp observe:

The conventional ideal of the single-family dwelling diminishes the social meaning and practical value of shared accommodations. The stigma of residential sharing flows not only from (the) presumption of involuntary necessity, but also from association with other forms of group quarters such as dormitories, barracks, jails, prisons, halfway houses, group homes, shelters and nursing homes in which institutional caretakers and rules organize residential sharing. (1996, 11–12)

We are witnessing deepening crisis in housing provision and access across Europe. The state-sponsored cultural norms of owner occupation are increasingly unsustainable in social, economic and environmental terms. This is evident in a growing mismatch between unimaginative housing and more varied household structures, non-traditional families, diverse

*Email: helen.jarvis@ncl.ac.uk

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patterns of mobility and increasingly complex transitions and changes in household composition over the life course (Duncan and Smith 2002). A striking and consistent trend is the rise in solo living (Kuijsten 1995, 60). Yet, the common perception is that people do not (will not) share housing except in extraordinary circumstances (Hemmens and Hoch 1996, 17).

There is nevertheless a long and rich history of countercultural groups who imagine and practise alternative forms of shared housekeeping and collaborative dwelling. Feminist scholars have been instrumental in bringing the most significant community experiments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to light, examining periodic efforts to challenge gender divisions of space and human work (Hayden 1976, 1981, 1984; Matrix 1984; Roberts 1991; McDowell 1983, 1999; Sargisson 2000). In 1830, for instance, Charles Fourier identified the isolated single-family dwelling as one of the greatest obstacles to improving the position of women, inspiring followers to establish cooperative colonies committed to the socialisation of domestic work (Hayden 1976, 1978, 275). Today, ecofeminists similarly identify the single-family dwelling as a fundamental impediment in the transition to a low-carbon future (Buckingham 2004; Hobson 2006; Crabtree 2006a, 2006b).

Notwithstanding this legacy, the ‘multiple tyrannies’ of single-family dwelling (to paraphrase C.P. Gilman in 1903; Gilman 2002) receive limited attention in contemporary debates on social justice and sustainability. This silence proceeds to an extent from a disciplinary ‘disconnect’ between cultural enquiries focusing on the meanings of home, on the one hand, and empirical studies exploring social cohesion and low-carbon housing, on the other hand (Quinn 2010; Dowling and Power 2011; Pickerill and Maxey 2009; Meijering, Huigen, and Van Hoven 2006). This is compounded by limited attention to gender and how it is produced through shared space and networks of sharing and mutuality. Despite important contributions from community-led low-carbon initiatives, including Transition Towns (Seyfang 2010; Jackson 2009), a gap in understanding remains concerning the social as well as the material barriers to sharing (Evans 2011; Vesergaard 2006). New research is needed in this area, especially now that we are witnessing renewed engagement with community-led housing; a groundswell that can be explained, in part, as a yearning for communality that has never really been extinguished by neo-liberal emphasis on individual self-reliance (Jarvis and Bonnett 2013).

In practice, a persistent thread of resistance and experimentation can be traced back to 1970s countercultural communities that survive to this day (Hayden 1976, 320; Cock 1979; Fromm 1991; Metcalf 1996; Fallesen and Hind 2008). One of the best known of these is the ‘Freetown’ of Christiania in the Danish capital of Copenhagen – the subject of this article. In Christiania, we find competing ‘revolutionary and reformist social visions’ whereby feminist family-friendly ideals collide with ambiguous, power-inflected expressions of autonomy, including adversarial tactics of de-centralised democracy, strained by organised crime associated with the sale of hash in the Freetown (Thörn et al. 2011, 8, 149). Thus, care must be taken not to conflate the ‘result’ of Christiania with contested day-to-day governing whereby ‘a misremembered past offers an illusory refuge for those unwilling to dwell fully in an unsettling present’ (Doyle 2012, 14). After all, Christiania is not, in practice, a fully functioning, classless, inclusive society.

The article is structured in four parts. First, Christiania is introduced as a lens through which to re-imagine affordable, adaptable, gender-democratic homes and neighbourhoods of the future. Second, a critical gaze is cast upon the flawed ideal of single-family dwelling through a series of interventions looking at oppression, isolation and waste. Third, the complexities and ambiguities of privacy and property are explored in relation to personal projects and tacit cultures of self-determination in Christiania. Finally, conclusions are drawn that pertain both to the specific case of Christiania and to the broader debate.
Magical, marginal Christiania

The self-governing community of Christiania was established in 1971 by squatter activists motivated by an acute shortage of affordable housing in the capital city, Copenhagen, as an ambitious but unspecified ‘social experiment’. Pioneer squatters occupied a barracks complex within a 35-hectare (85-acre) lake-side site that had been vacated by the Danish army three months earlier. The intention was ‘to build houses and organise a society’, to create ‘a classless urban commune’, ‘a small town, a village in the city’, where there was ‘freedom enough for everybody’ (quotes from Vest 1991). Christiania represents the longest surviving illegal alternative lifestyle community to have emerged from the 1970s. Remarkably, it operated outside the legal framework of modern Denmark for nearly 40 years until February 2011 when the Supreme Court in Denmark upheld an earlier lower court decision, ruling that it was the state that held the legal right to the squatted land. Rather than send in the bulldozers, as threatened so many times since 1974 when the conservative government wanted to demolish 66 ‘irregular dwellings’ (Thörn et al. 2011, 77), the Danish state proposed a ‘take it or leave it’ deal whereby Christianites would collectively purchase the site and buildings on favourable terms, on strict conditions that they would ‘normalize’ the allocation, management and construction of new and existing homes. In effect, this proposal allows Christiania ‘to become a miniature municipal council’ (Heppenstall 2011, 17).

This article does not dwell on what has been a lengthy and controversial political battle (see chapters in Thörn et al. 2011 for an overview). Instead, it draws insights from homemaking and family life in Christiania to explore the ‘social architecture’ of sharing and mutuality in practice. Parallels are drawn with less radical contemporary ‘intentional communities’ where the purpose, or intention, is to make it easier for individuals and families to retain a necessary degree of privacy while routinely participating in communal facilities and self-governance. Christiania is an important case because it clearly demonstrates multiple and diverse sites and scales of homemaking, community building and creative means of livelihood. A multi-scalar understanding of shared space and collective endeavour resonates with debates in urban studies concerning public space and civil society (Mitchell 2003). For example, when Sophie Watson (2006, 5) celebrates the ‘magical urban encounters . . . of buzzing intermingling . . . (in the) scruffy, unplanned and marginal public spaces’ to be discovered in cities across the globe, she could as easily have been writing about Christiania as about a city farm in London. This suggests that autonomous community spaces, such as Christiania, harbour valuable insights with respect to incubating vitality and resilience (see also Doyle 2012).

A significant but neglected story of the countercultural movement that inspired Christiania was distaste for the emphasis on privacy and personal attachment to material possessions attributed to the conventional western nuclear family and home (Cock 1979; Manzella 2010). Print media reports from the 1970s convey what was an uneasy mix of disgust and admiration publicly expressed towards Christianites who ‘rejected waste and impersonal welfare’:

Nearly everyone lives on a low level of consumption. The general store will sell you a teaspoonful of sugar if that is all you need. An old garage has been turned into a flea market and furniture repair shop dedicated to the rehabilitation of drug addicts. A riding hall has become one of Copenhagen’s most successful theatres, specialising in anti-capitalist satire. A former powder plant is now a blacksmiths shop based entirely on recycling and doing brisk business turning oil drums into stoves. (Duus 1976, 2)

The sense in which Christiania continues to resist the hyper-modernity and hyper-privatisation of property speculation and consumption is suggested in the award-winning
1991 film anthology *Christiania, You Have My Heart*. In it, one female resident explains that:

> When you enter Christiania it is (as if) time slows down, as if the pace is not as hectic as it is outside in Copenhagen. In some ways it is a bit like a rural village in the middle of the big city, and it is nice to live in a village where you have a large social network and where it is good to raise your children. It is very safe and you know a lot of people. Everyone knows everyone more or less. (Vest 1991)

The discussion below considers the extent to which the unique social and material conditions of collective living in Christiania fulfil long-standing feminist family-friendly ideals – such as those of the Nordic ‘New Everyday Life’ housing and community project (Horelli and Vespa 1994). This vision highlights the neglected significance of a ‘social architecture’ to correspond with the priority usually given in orthodox (arguably androcentric) planning to the design and layout of the built environment (Booth and Gilroy 1999; Miles 2008; Jarvis 2009, 2011b).

**Multiple tyrannies, multiple challenges**

The damaging effects of ‘isolated, over-privatized, energy consuming’ individual dwelling have attracted extensive critique over the course of many decades (Hayden 1981, 171; Parker, Pearson, and Richards 1994). One way of interpreting and organising this literature is to recognise three particular challenges to the flawed ideals (tyrannies) of single-family dwelling, each articulating discrete (but arguably co-constitutive) benefits of shared housekeeping and collaborative dwelling. First is literature highlighting the oppressive impact single-family dwelling has on gender divisions of social reproduction; second is literature highlighting the social isolation resulting from this flawed ideal; and third is literature demonstrating the wasteful and inefficient use of domestic energy and consumer goods.

**Overcoming oppression**

Claims of a historically entrenched mix of state policy and cultural expectation regarding family life, gender relations, public health and motherhood have been the recurring themes of socialist feminist writing, prompting ongoing research and development along the lines of inclusive urban design (Matrix 1984; Roberts 1991; Addams 1996; Greed and Roberts 2001). In 1903, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote of the ‘tyranny’ and ‘arrested development’ of single-family dwellings ‘threaded like beads on a string’. She deplored the deception of the ‘home as haven’, which confined women to perform myriad privately intensive domestic tasks. Her thesis inspired the architect Ebenezer Howard to propose a form of ‘cooperative quadrangle’ to release women from household drudgery in the private home, arranging garden apartments around a collective kitchen, dining room and open spaces (Hayden 1984, 90).

Despite persuasive feminist critique and evidence of viable alternatives (notably the Israeli Kibbutz and the extended family compounds typical of many African and Central Asian countries), patterns of dwelling and the internal arrangement of domestic space in the northern hemisphere have remained conservative and inward looking. This is largely explained by the persistence of Anglo-Saxon cultural traditions (Banham 1973) and the human capital sacrificed to expectations of privacy, comfort and cleanliness (Shove 2003; Campkin and Cox 2007). Accordingly, while gender studies emphasise the fluid boundaries between private and public domestic practice (Mills 2007), standardised
interiors persist with a rigid separation that poorly meets the realities of housing, care and lifetime transitions for non-traditional families and an ageing population (Wekerle 1978; Kamerman 1979; Watson 1986; Trice and Merrill 2010).

Challenging the androcentrism of single-family dwelling has led feminist scholars to research a wide range of utopian experiments in urban design. These experiments typically emphasise collective housekeeping and housing with shared facilities (Fromm 1991). Indeed, Kanter (Kanter 1976, 331) provocatively argues that ‘cooperative households in cities are as valid a part of the American tradition as suburban picket fences’. Vestbro (1997) usefully differentiates between two periods of experimentation in collective housing in Sweden that reflect broader shifts in feminist thinking. First, the modernist collective housing unit or ‘family hotel’ featured a clear division of labour between occupants and employed staff (Caldenby and Walldén 1979). Feminist social reformers actively promoted this model in Sweden from the early 1930s to liberate (middle class) women from housework and enable them to pursue careers outside the home (Vestbro 1992). State hostility towards the ‘dissolution of the family’ and accusations of elitism saw new construction abandoned in 1949 and the last of the ‘family hotels’ were disbanded in the mid-1970s (Vestbro 1997, 331). Second, the ‘self-work’ model of resident-led (social rented or cooperative) kollektivhus developed from the early 1970s. This arrangement, combining modestly apportioned private space with common facilities for shared daily use and non-hierarchical collective self-governance, was inspired in part by the Danish ‘housing-cum-neighbourhood’ model of bofællesskab (living togetherness) (Bamford 2001, 2).

The ethos of cooperative ‘self work’ resonates with feminist ideology of the 1960s, which emphasised the emancipatory power of solidarity in collective activity. Whether or not in practice communal kitchens are emancipatory remains the subject of debate (Schroeder 2007). Nevertheless, ‘solidarity in belonging’ can be viewed as a dimension of community resilience that is evident in Christiania. Drawing on the work of Maffesoli (1996), notions of solidarity and autonomy help distinguish the vision of sharing and participation in a multi-focal community setting such as Christiania from historical examples of totalitarian or ideologically exclusive communes. Multi-focal community settings introduce a broader vision of sharing to that of either the nuclear family or the tribe (Manzella 2010, 42; Maffesoli 1996). This is evident below in examples of co-parenting following separation.

**Overcoming isolation**

A central theme of this second body of literature is the role of domestic architecture and residential landscape in promoting urban vitality and social cohesion. While rarely addressed through explicit opposition to single-family dwelling, this approach emphasises the need to consider new ways of fostering shared public space and mutuality through daily social interaction in close-knit residential arrangements. This is evident in academic literature and policy with respect to housing density and scale, mixed land uses, shared public space, proximity to shops and amenities and the extent to which streetscapes exclude or invite walking and recreation (Talen 1999; Duany et al. 2003). It is evident too in public health circles where there is growing concern for the mental health risks of a lonely society (Griffin 2010; Ahrentzen 2003).

The social doctrine and aesthetic quality of what is widely known as the new urbanism has intuitive appeal: it emphasises the small town feel inherent in traditional neighbourhood design (similar to descriptions of Christiania above) not only as an architectural paradigm but as ‘a social synthesis’ intended to cultivate a sense of
community rooted in trust and reciprocity (Krier 1991, 119, cited in Talen 1999, 1362). Arguably, belief in the possibility of reconnecting people and place through social contact design has shaped the debate on sustainable communities in damaging as well as benign ways (Williams 2005). This is because intentions are complicated by the interplay of popular yearning for an ‘ideal home and family life’ and instrumental top-down interventions by institutional actors who appear to exploit this nostalgia in deterministic ways (Jarvis and Bonnett 2013).

A crucial distinction is made here between the engineering principles of social contact design underpinning the new urbanism and similar emphasis on shared space in community-led development, where the latter entails participatory design and management (McCamant and Durrett 1994). In short, the new urbanism harbours disconnect between a ‘master-planned’ image of close-knit affiliations (with spaces allocated for social encounter and interaction) and a lack of appreciation for the ‘soft’ infrastructures (of reciprocity, trust, social time and a moral economy) necessary to cultivate and sustain attachment and affiliation. By contrast, feminist scholarship highlights multiple ‘soft’ infrastructures of human attachment, memory, belonging and yearning that confound ‘top down’ efforts to reduce these to instruments of political ‘usefulness’ (Jarvis and Bonnett 2013).

**Overcoming waste**

Finally, a third body of literature draws attention to the carbon footprint associated with single-family dwelling. It is well known that the richest 20% of the world’s population consume 80% of global resources whereby inequality is driven by the accumulation of excess ‘stuff’ along with its packaging, storage and transportation (Molotch 2003; Lane and Gorman-Murray 2011). Wolch (2007) traces the growth of new social movements that function to resist and ameliorate the waste of overconsumption. Thus, connections are made between social movements of voluntary simplicity and alternative lifestyle communities such as cohousing and eco-village initiatives. In this sense, co-presence and affiliation actively facilitate instrumental sharing to reduce waste (Ahrentzen 1996, 50) whereby efficiencies can be gained from establishing communal access to infrequently used household and garden appliances.

Conventional urban structure cultivates neither the interaction and trust nor the practical mechanisms necessary for neighbours to collectively purchase and manage shared tools and appliances in order to overcome the problems of excess ‘stuff’, storage and waste. Unlocking this potential in the future appears to require either off-grid development, which is typically limited to small-scale projects in rural locations (Pickerill and Maxey 2009; Pickerill 2009; Meijering, Huigen, and Van Hoven 2006), or investment in social infrastructures that facilitate sharing (Jarvis 2011b; Seyfang 2010).

In summary, the carbon footprint of the average dwelling (land, energy and consumer goods and services) has increased, while the average household has been shrinking in size and the social sites and milieu representing homes, shops, schools and sites of employment remain dispersed and disconnected (Jarvis, Pratt, and Wu 2001). This highlights the importance of tackling the tyranny of single-family dwelling not as a discrete ‘housing’ issue, but as an integrated function of sustainability (environment, economy and equity) (Pickerill 2009), permeating multiple scales of dwelling and livelihood (Crabtree 2006b). A key aim of this article, therefore, is to highlight the distinguishing features of collective and collaborative dwelling – beyond shared housing (as with cohousing for instance) to include the social architecture of shared work, shared values and circuits of learning. In this respect, Christiania offers an ideal case study site. First, however, it is constructive to
situate practices of sharing in Christiania relative to the most common categories of shared and collective dwelling found in market-led economies of the global north.

Shared domestic space and practice: towards a classification

Table 1 offers a simple classification of the most common forms of shared domestic space observed in market-led economies such as the UK, the USA and Australia, as well as the more socially progressive Danish context. This classification differentiates between dwelling arrangements that are ‘community-led’ (intentional), those indicating involuntary sharing (boarding/lodging, group quarters and shelters) and those representing commercially managed common-use facilities. To put this spectrum into perspective, approximately 50% of Americans are suggested to live in housing with some form of shared facilities or open space, such as with condominiums where there is private ownership of the dwellings and common ownership of the land (Fromm 1991, 158). Yet, few would recognise any similarity between US condominiums and Christiania, or indeed Danish cohousing, because the former is developer-led, master-planned and largely built with privacy, not communality, in mind (Fromm 1991, 158). This is not to deny that opportunities exist to develop neighbourliness in some existing housing schemes with shared facilities such as laundries; the point is that this is not sufficient to challenge confinement (walls and consumer cultures) to privatised dwelling.

The characteristics noted in each of the columns in Table 1 show sharing to involve multiple, complex factors, including architectural space, social time, income, livelihood, housekeeping, care, coordination, beliefs, values, property, power and decision-making. The implications of physically sharing domestic space vary from non-exclusive use of kitchen and bathroom facilities in a communal house, collective ownership and participation in communal facilities (e.g., a common house allowing for shared meals, laundry, creche, tool store) and shared recreation space managed by paid staff. The scale of sharing also varies from a small number of individuals, to a small number of households (typically 30 households in US purpose built cohousing) to populations of several hundred individuals of all ages. Social support and caretaking may be limited to joint responsibility for common spaces and amenities, establishing a minimal reciprocity by adopting practices of propriety, cleanliness and security (‘some’ in the table) (Hemmens et al. 1996, 9). Where it is strongly supported (‘yes’ in the table), it reflects intentional commitment to collaboration.

Methodology

The remaining discussion draws on first-hand observations and oral histories from a fortnight as researcher in residence in Christiania in 2010 and three subsequent visits to participate in community activities. Secondary data include a thematic review of Danish newspaper articles on the subject of Christiania (translated into English) alongside English language articles and reports and both oral and electronic correspondence with residents who provided regular updates on the local impact of negotiations with the state.

Primary data includes nine interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim, plus five lengthy participant-observed interactions transcribed from recall. Inhabiting the community as a lone mother (accompanied by my school-age daughter) in an invited capacity (as researcher in residence), I was able to participate in shared meals and working bees, casual encounters and conversations with residents and visitors. The homes visited spanned a number of dwelling types representative of the 14 discrete areas that Christiania is organised into (Figure 1); large rooms on a shared floor of Fredens Ark (Figure 2); studio
Table 1. Simple (generalised) classification of sharing structures, property and power for the main types of (intentional, private and institutional) shared domestic arrangements (as observed in the market-led economies of the UK, the USA, Australia and Scandinavia).

| Sharing structures          | Property and power                      |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
|                             | Tenure                                   |
|                             | Income pooling                          |
|                             | Governance (decision-making)            |
|                             | Space (e.g. kitchen)                    | Cooperative rental | Yes | Self-governance consensus |
| Commune                     | Collective food production               | Strata title owner occupation | No  | Self-governance consensus |
| Eco-village                 | Social support and caretaking           | Strata title or LLC owner occupation | No  | Self-governance consensus |
| Cohousing                   |                                        | Cooperative rental | Some | Cooperative               |
| Housing cooperative         |                                        | Strata title owner occupation | No  | Home-owners association   |
| Condo                       |                                        | Private rental       | Some | Property owner            |
| Boarding/rooming            |                                        | Social rental        | Unlikely | Management committee |
| Congregate/shelter/group homes |                                        | | |

Note: ‘Some’ means occasional sharing. Source: Author’s matrix adapted in part from Hemmens, Hoch, Carp (1996): Figure 1, p. 8.
apartments fashioned out of the distinctive acute angle buildings on the rampart promontory; self-built chalets (Figure 3), adapted site-huts and original stone buildings variously situated along the ramparts, in the wooded areas and on the edge of ‘Christiania town’. Observations were made by attending public festivals, such as Christiania’s ‘alternative’ Grundlovsdag (Constitution Day), as well as a more intimate community fundraising event at the Operaen. Much was gained from everyday routines: cycling the length and breadth of the 85 acre site many times; shopping for groceries at the Indkøbscentralen and Grønsagen; attending the children’s facilities and theatre; and frequenting the community cafés and eating places.

Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the rights to anonymity of individuals interviewed. All personal communications have been conducted in English (where this is a fluent second language for a majority of residents). Interviews and photographs were taken on the basis of informed consent. Interviews were transcribed for thematic coding and narrative analysis. The interview quotes that are included in the discussion are selected to illustrate and represent significant themes that emerged from a close reading of the complete body of data. A detailed picture is pieced together of the infrastructures of sharing in daily life; in the built environment, across the social institutions and in the local moral cultures of shared space and collective action.

Sharing in Christiania
Cultures of sharing in Christiania are shaped to a considerable extent by the absence of a real property market: individuals have the right to occupy but never to own or benefit
Figure 2. Fredens Ark with accommodation varying from single-room apartments to an entire floor which is shared communally by multiple unrelated adults and families; the ‘Christiania bicycle’ is used to variously transport children, groceries and locally recycled building materials.

Figure 3. One of many innovative self-built dwellings – this one ‘floating’ on the lake in the Nordområdet area of Christiania.
financially from transferring the rights of use of their home or business premises to someone else. This functions alongside a vital ‘do-it-yourself’ culture of sweat equity and collaboration in homemaking. From the outset, the unspoken rule of the ‘Christiania way’ was to renovate and adapt rather than to tear down existing buildings and to build with reclaimed materials at minimum cost. A ‘junk playground’ aesthetic naturally emerged from the quest for flere fristeder (free sanctuary): a retreat from authority (eschewing state building regulations), and rejection of mass market merchandise. This cultivated ambiguous public spaces that remain ‘cluttered yet open ended’, with interiors that are ‘provisional but homey’ (Jarvis 2011a, 170).

When the Bådsmandsstræde Barracks site was first occupied, there were approximately 150 existing buildings, including the substantial, half-timbered, commander’s house (Fredens Ark), seventeenth- and eighteenth-century powder magazines on the bastions, a large indoor riding arena (Den grå hal) and a smaller riding house (Den grønne hal). These historic buildings, which now have conservation status with the National Heritage Agency, were unused and very run down when squatters took up residence in 1971. The following years saw the original buildings incrementally modified and upgraded and approximately 175 new buildings added. By 1975, the resident population was 850–900, similar to what it is today (National Museum 1975). Paradoxically, while the size and run-down state of substantial building complexes such as the Milky Way (Mælkevejen) supported a pattern of shared housekeeping (such as the Nova housing cooperative reported by Hellström Reimer 2011, 135), the practice of provisional, do it yourself (DIY) construction has meant that additional homes largely comprise humble single-family dwellings. Moreover, with one or two notable exceptions, where large houses continue to function as communes (for instance, Stjerneskribe, The Star Ship, which is a form of hostel), few of the original housing cooperatives survive today. The way that existing buildings have been sub-divided into apartments offers limited scope for separate households to subscribe to collective housekeeping on any regular basis. This retreat from shared housekeeping reflects both pre-occupation with personalised ‘homeyness’ and the flat rate common purse payment. Each adult resident pays the same rent, irrespective of the size and condition of the interior space they inhabit. In the large shared buildings, this has led to a degree of interior colonisation or ‘normalisation’ by established occupants who seek to expand their bedroom or transform living spaces into workspaces when a resident dies or moves out (Amouroux 2011, 242).

There are many examples of shared meals, communal dining and shared childcare, to be sure, but new homes have not been built around communal kitchens. The best known communal eating place in Christiania is the Fælleskokkenet (the communal kitchen) that functions both as a low-budget café and a free ‘soup kitchen’ at certain times of the week. Then, there is the novel practice of having table settings set aside for Christianites in the up-market restaurant Spiseplassen (The Flea): on one side, tables are set for commercial service; the other side is simply furnished with refectory tables and benches for any Christianite who wishes to buy a ‘house meal’ for a nominal payment. The idea that neighbours can routinely sit down together to share a meal that is prepared centrally for this purpose is similar to that of the ‘family hotels’ that eliminated the need for individual cooking space by serving family meals for communal dining (Vestbro 1992, Vestbro 1997). In principle, communal dining cultivates social capital, reduces the burden of unpaid (feminised) domestic work and reduces energy consumption. In practice, on the occasions observed, participation tends to be limited to single persons and couples and social interactions are limited between different parties. Arguably, it is important not to romanticise opportunities for social interaction in a contested community such as this. As Birgitte observes:
We take more care now; we allow people their privacy too; actually it’s very important not to be too intrusive – and if you have a neighbour you don’t like it’s best to stay quiet, because it’s not like you can sell your house and move on, you know, so you have to get on and make it work.

This illustrates the way sharing practices are shaped by the interdependence of social and material opportunities (shared space and social time) and constraints (feeling ‘trapped’ in situations where inter-personal conflict can threaten aspects of belonging). This highlights the importance in planning for convivial social architectures, to allow scope to retreat from interpersonal conflict.

**Social infrastructure**

Without doubt the collaborative institutions of Christiania represent a sophisticated social infrastructure of communal facilities, humanistic welfare, participatory governance, networks of reciprocity, all of these ‘lubricated’ by the daily debate that goes on privately as well in Christiania’s public space. By 1975, Christiania had organised significant shared facilities for communal use such as a bath house and laundry, a nursery and kindergarten, garbage collection and recycling and numerous cooperative businesses including shops, bars, cafes, a blacksmith (now a bicycle factory and separate women’s smithy), craft workshops, theatre and gallery. Multiple economies of dwelling, reciprocity and livelihood have always been intermeshed here (see Gibson-Graham 1996), although many more Christianites today earn a living from off-site employment.

The community has invested considerable sums from the Common Purse in the maintenance of the grounds, modernisation of the sewerage system and a range of social welfare including a health and social work consultancy (*Herfra og Videre* – Onwards and Upwards), machine hall, economic administration, children’s institutions for all ages, internal post office, radio station and free weekly newspaper. The annual budget is determined at the Common Meeting (the largest and ultimate decision-making entity in a series of meetings comprising Christiania’s self-governance).

Access to a vacant dwelling is not restricted by income, as it would elsewhere, but neither is it managed through a waiting list. Instead, the transfer of occupation is determined by the Area Meeting, or in the case of rooms available in one of the large shared houses, at the House Meeting (Thörn et al. 2011). Local decisions are made by consensus in monthly meetings for each of the 14 geographical areas. For some Christianites, the absence of a system based on a majority vote has created a powerful sense of unity in struggles against the state. For others, especially on issues relating to the allocation and renovation of housing, the experience of unresolved conflict can be acrimonious and exhausting (Starecheski 2011, 265). As Amouroux (2011) observes, ‘anyone can speak in Christiania, but to be heard, to have your opinion regarded by others, requires acceptance from the community’. Perception of personal worth reflects a clash of cultures between ‘pushers’ (selling hash) and activists. Pushers emphasise group affiliation while activists value preservation of the ‘Christiania way’ (low-impact construction, cooperatively maintained gardens, community work and modest consumption with emphasis on self-made objects): pushers are seen as taking from rather than giving to the community (Hellström 2006). A recent dispute over the erection of an ‘illegal’ fence around a pusher’s house is typical in this regard.

**Home-making and fluid families**

Christianites flout not only urban policies but also traditional gender roles and aesthetic conventions. Hypermodernity is actively resisted through a post-material interpretation of
reclaimed, reused, home-made authenticity. Saffi, for instance, differentiates the process of making a home ‘as a place to live’ from simply squatting. She moved into her home (the empty shell of a chemical store) in 1974, claiming it from squatters ‘who just crashed here, slept on hammocks in the building as it was’. She explains how it took many years to incrementally improve or replace walls, roof and windows and to install heating and plumbing, and to add the brightly painted trim necessary to locate her home in the absence of street names and numbers. This craft process of self-build, suggests the liberation of housing construction from its conventional association with a male-dominated industry, where ‘the tools of the trade are linked to assumptions about strength and toughness, and knowledge of a particular language and code of behaviour’ (Pringle and Winning 1998, 221). The same would be true of other examples of housing restoration work, but here the skills are learned and traded through a ‘barn-raising’ collaborative ethos, against the grain of stereotyped definitions of women’s and men’s competencies.

Local expectations of gender democracy extend beyond homemaking to household composition and cultures of parenting. A frequent narrative among those who have raised families in Christiania is one of fluid family living arrangements. In the study, Mia, Saffi, Dorete, Ulrike and Anton (four mothers and one father) each claim that living in Christiania enabled them to negotiate the consequences of separation, divorce, single motherhood and transition to a blended family arrangement in more flexible, humanistic ways than they believe would have been possible ‘outside’ in mainstream urban social structures. Dorete explains:

I came to live here together with my boyfriend in 1974 ... we went on to have two children ... and that was back in the time when we had no electricity and we had no water inside the house, so we had to carry water in and waste out; we had no toilet either, so that was tough. We had a stove with chopped wood so a lot of our time was taken up with all those everyday things. It was hard but we chose (that way of life); and it gave us time to be with the children when they were small. When the children were seven and three their father and I separated and I went to live in another place. We both wanted to stay in Christiania; we wanted to stay close to each other for the children, so Christiania made it possible for us to separate but still to raise the children together. We stayed good friends so we didn’t have those fights in that way.

We learn from a variety of experiments in shared living arrangements elsewhere that collaborative housing offers practical as well as social support for the upheaval of household transitions such as separation from a lover or spouse, adult offspring leaving home or caring for elderly parents (Maxey 2004; Manzella 2010). In Christiania, this local practice of co-parenting from separate dwellings reflects both a countercultural motivation to ‘loosen traditional family ties’ and ‘create new forms of family’ (Manzella 2010, 40) and an uneven, inconsistent shift in gender politics.

On the one hand, it is apparent that fatherhood is increasingly central to men’s identity in Christiania, as in Denmark generally. Bekkenæng (2002) uses the expression ‘child oriented masculinity’ to describe the close relationship many men want with their children. On the other hand, the ‘negotiated family’ fails to challenge, or necessarily change, underlying gender relations. Further tensions are apparent between individual freedom and convivial, collaborative ideals. On the one hand, Birgitte and Mia describe a rich infrastructure of support for ‘women without fathers for their children’ managing collectively in Børneengen (the children’s field); as a place where ‘you just open your door and there are people everywhere (to) make food and eat together, the children played together’. On the other hand, they acknowledge that they each define themselves through their rejection of the mainstream and by individual freedom to ‘do one’s own thing’ (Amouroux 2006). The result is an ambivalent outcome for the ‘myth’ of the ‘democratic
family’ (Ahlberg, Roman, and Duncan 2008). Conflicts arising from this balancing act can result in verbal assault and violent, criminal acts that the community infrastructure often fails to resolve or mediate fairly, as expanded below with respect to gender inequality in consensus governance.

Adaptable, flexible dwelling
The culture of do-it-yourself homemaking suits fluid family composition in part because individual dwellings can be adapted or allowed to expand or shrink in a way that is not possible with conventional housing market models. There are two different approaches. First are wagon-built ‘exploded’ homes that have grown incrementally like petals round a bud as the occupants first make do with one wagon and then add more as their circumstances change and they have time and materials to invest in further construction. Here, there are parallels with the complex ways that home owners in mainstream markets exploit housing consumption services (inhabiting a basement, attic, garage or constructing an accessory dwelling) to privately deal with debt and the rising costs of family care (Rudel 1984; Hare and Guttmann 1984; Jarvis 2009). Understanding the creative ways that housing, welfare and livelihood intersect, whether or not through the mechanisms of a real property market, helps explain why the state ban on further home construction (modifications as well as new building) had such a severe negative impact on family life in Christiania in recent years.

Second are open-plan interiors that break with the conventional pattern of domestic spaces sub-divided into daytime living and sleeping areas. Space efficiencies are made, and opportunities for social interaction increased, through the widespread use of multipurpose (open-plan) space, temporary dividing walls and furniture that can be cut down or extended according to changes in household composition. Arguably, it is easier to abandon the ‘wasteful’ practice of ‘symbolic’ spaces for formally receiving guests (Lawrence 1982, 110) in a community where social occasions and casual meetings are encouraged in streets, cafes and communal spaces. Whether post-material cultures of homemaking in Christiania liberate women from housework to enable them to pursue alternative, autonomous income and livelihood strategies on equal terms with men remains a moot point. As previously noted, the reconfiguration of domestic arrangements to de-emphasise privacy and property frequently introduces a new layer of ‘home-made’ social reproduction work.

In addition to the way interiors are adapted, there are reported cases (Johan, Adam, Jasmin, Ulrike) where the space allocation of individual dwellings has been increased or reduced by shifting the party walls in sub-divided buildings: for example, creating two apartments out of three when a middle room became vacant. In each case, proposed adaptations went before the area meeting to be decided by consensus. For example, Jasmin originally occupied a slender room that could only accommodate one person. When she was dating Poul and contemplating him moving in with her, she needed to increase her living space. Her immediate neighbour (in the large building that had previously been a factory) had a much bigger apartment. When he moved out, she went to the area meeting to discuss the possibility of extending her place sideways. Jasmin and Poul undertook the demolition and repositioning of the party wall with the help from neighbours in their geographic area. This practice of shifting party walls resonates with Årentzen 1996 discussion of different ways that the party wall can be conceived where this may reflect different types of sharing; co-presence, affiliation (social-oriented interaction) or instrumental (task-oriented exchanges). It is possible to harness both the connecting and separating qualities of the party wall in Christiania because property is collectively
negotiated, rather than traded as a private commodity. At the same time, there is evidence of an abuse of this shifting interior space allocation as noted above with ‘illegal’ colonisation in communal buildings.

**Gender inequalities in participatory practice**

Perhaps inevitably, the social and material networks that cultivate conviviality and sharing in Christiania are not always benign or sufficient to combat persistent gender inequalities. By now, it should be apparent that the infrastructure of daily life in Christiania (as indeed in other close-knit community settings) incorporates tacit moral codes concerning, for instance, sharing, participation, innovation, tolerance and freedom from authority. While homemaking and parenting are less constrained by conventional capital assets (housing, utilities, income and savings/debt), other powerful social capital attributes (such as confidence and communication) assume greater significance in perceptions of personal worth. For instance, direct democracy places greater emphasis on face-to-face oral communication that puts those who lack particular communication skills (speech/hearing/vocabulary) at a disadvantage. In the absence of ‘leaders’, Christiania comprises many discrete interest groups that live together, in conflict as well as cooperation, rather than as individuals committed to being part of a bigger project of social transformation.

Since the 1970s, ethnographers and documentary film-makers have attempted to make sense of the common meeting (*fællesmød*den) and the lengthy debates entailed in direct democracy, where consensus rests with unanimous agreement. The adversarial tone of this forum is widely reported: Jacob Ludvigsen (disaffected co-founder) no longer believes that direct common consensus is democratic because of the breakdown of rules of fair discourse and agreement (Øberg 2007). Amy Starecheski (Starecheski 2011, 263) observes that while recent meetings to decide whether to accept or reject state ‘normalisation’ proposals have been ‘packed, sometimes night after night, by arguing, listening, debating residents’, many common meetings are not well attended. Ulrike admits that she rarely attends the common meeting because she is intimidated by the ‘angry and hostile’ tone of debate. She finds it easier to discuss the really contentious issues with other women rather than in the open meetings. Birgitte reflects on the way the periodic mobilisation of women-only meetings has gained a ‘moral achievement’ in the past for helping the community take positive action at times of crisis:

Throughout the history of Christiania when life has become intolerable the women have got together and sorted out a practical way forward – and it will be so again.

For example, the 1979, ‘junk blockade’ was a notable achievement of such diplomacy and direct action: the women’s group was instrumental in ridding Pusher Street of hard drugs at a time when ‘the most deadly threat to Christiania came from inside in the form of heroin’ (Thörn et al. 2011, 48). While the women’s meetings do not carry the weight of consensus, by demonstrating ways to resolve conflict by ‘taking care of each other’ and focusing on the practical business of daily life, they contribute a modifying form of participatory democracy (Jarvis 2011a; see also Starecheski 2011).

**Conclusion**

This article has drawn attention to a number of unmistakable distinctions, as well as many more subtle ones, between visions and practices of home and family life in the countercultural community of Christiania compared with mainstream market-let residential neighbourhoods. Attention has been drawn to the ‘soft infrastructures’ of ‘openness, care,
preservation, communal living and anti-consumption’ (Thörn et al. 2011, 248) that make Christiania ‘difficult to leave’ and ‘a good life to live’ for parents with young children in particular. As timely as it is at this critical moment in Christiania’s history to reflect on the creative initiatives and collective support that Christianites routinely engage in to resolve the multiple threads of their home–work–parenting identities, it is equally relevant for mainstream debate to revisit the problems of single-family dwelling. Consequently, this article engages with issues that are of widespread contemporary relevance. A compelling case is made for recognising the insights that countercultural communities have to offer those institutions and organisations seeking to de-emphasise privacy, isolation, competition and oppression in housing and community development. For example, the intimate scale of dwelling and diverse, locally distinct patterns of livelihood nurtured by the ‘Christiania way’ resonate with the espoused aims of less-radical ‘smart growth’, ‘new urbanism’ and ‘slow living’ agendas (Pink 2008; Mayer and Knox 2006; Jarvis and Bonnett 2013).

This resonance suggests the potential value and significance of unplanned, marginal community sites as laboratories for uncovering the hidden, multiple, complex constituents of co-production, resilience and solidarity – lessons that would appear to have wide appeal among civic leaders and activists seeking to understand and promote humanistic urban design and governance. The potential transmission of innovations from the margins to the mainstream is illustrated in the ‘deal’ the Danish state struck with Christiania over the conditional purchase of the squatted site and buildings. This exposes the conundrum that while Christiania represents a way of life that functions in opposition to the neo-liberal state; it also serves as a magnet for overseas visitors, trading in the ‘brand’ of Danish liberal-minded tolerance.

This article sought to challenge the cultural ideal of the single-family dwelling by identifying the way diverse sharing practices thrive in alternative, autonomous, intentional community settings. Advocating more experimental, collective and collaborative systems of housing does not anticipate wholesale abandonment of the single-family house. Rather, this agenda highlights the need to dismantle ‘unnecessary social, legal, and political barriers to (alternative) development’ (Hemmens et al. 1996, 12). One reason why it is possible to live well on a lower income in Christiania, with positive benefits for the environment and participation in the work of community is the existence of collective welfare institutions that provide support in times of crisis. These social systems are especially vulnerable to state-imposed ‘normalization’ including the unequal (and, for some, prohibitively costly) burden of modifying and maintaining dwellings to a universal standard.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the idea that flere fristerer can deliver greater gender equality lingers in the imagination of Christiania as an unfulfilled entitlement. While the social architectures of informality, autonomy and flexibility provide practical support for ‘women without fathers for their children’, they fail to address the influence of dependence, interdependence, tradition and power-permeating efforts to dismantle the ‘tyrannies’ of the western nuclear family and home. It is nevertheless important to recognise that Christiania does shelter ‘misfit’ individuals and families who would otherwise not find sanctuary in the city at all. Thus, by examining alternative expressions of homemaking at the contested margins of the mainstream, this article provokes further debate and research on new ways of thinking about dwelling and mutuality.

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Notes on contributor
Helen Jarvis is Reader in Social Geography at Newcastle University in the UK. Her work focuses on work and employment, housing and gender relations through close attention to household decision-making, diverse livelihoods, community engagement and everyday time-space co-ordination. One strand of current research focuses on planning and policy innovations to be drawn from the slow-living movement. Another strand examines everyday life in a variety of intentional communities (notably cohousing) comparing alternative living space and shared housekeeping practices in Britain, the USA, Australia, Café and Scandinavia. Published books include Cities and Gender (Routledge, 2009), Work/Life City Limits (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and The Secret Life of Cities (Prentice Hall, 2001). Helen has held visiting academic positions at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, University of California at Berkeley and University of Washington, USA.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS
Contra la “tirania” de la vivienda unifamiliar: perspectivas desde Christiania a los 40
La propiedad de una vivienda unifamiliar sigue siendo la aspiración dominante en las economías de mercado. En un paisaje hiperprivatizado está ampliamente aceptado que las personas no comparten su vivienda salvo en circunstancias extraordinarias. Sin embargo existe una larga y rica historia de grupos contraculturales que imaginan y practican formas alternativas de trabajo doméstico compartido y vivienda colaborativa. Este artículo se basa en observaciones de primera mano de la vida diaria de la comunidad contracultural de Christiania, en la capital danesa de Copenhague, en un momento crítico en una historia de 40 años de amenaza de “normalización” de parte del Estado. Christiania es una óptica intrigante a través de la cual se pueden reimaginar viviendas y estructuras urbanas asequibles, adaptables, y democráticas desde el punto de vista del género: rebela cómo el compartir, la mutualidad y la innovación se intersectan en múltiples escalas de las labores domésticos y la gobernanza comunitaria. Estas perspectivas son relevantes para provocar un nuevo pensamiento sobre la vivienda y la mutualidad en el contexto de una crisis de provisión y acceso a la vivienda que se profundiza en toda Europa.

Palabras claves: Christiania; compartir; vivienda; familia; sustentabilidad; cuidado

反对单一家户住宅的专制暴政：克里斯蒂安那(Christiania)四十周年的洞见
拥有单一的家户住宅，仍然是市场导向经济中的支配性渴望。在极度私有化的地景中，普遍预设了人们除了在非常特殊的情况之外，并不会共享家户。尽管如此，反文化团体在想象与实践另类的共享家户形式与合作式住宅方面，仍然有着丰富且悠久的历史。位于丹麦首都哥本哈根的克里斯蒂安那(Christiania)反文化社区，在
国家欲将之“正常化”的威胁之下，已迈入第四十年的历史性关键时刻，本研究将对该社区的日常生活进行现场观察。克里斯蒂安那提供了我们有趣的视角，藉此再想象合宜的、能适应新环境的、性别民主的住宅与城市结构：它显示了共享、互惠与创新如何在户打造与社区管理的多重尺度中交会。这些洞见在全欧洲住宅供给与使用危机深化的脉络下，将有助于触发对住居与互惠的崭新想法。

**关键词**：克里斯蒂安; 共享; 住居; 家庭; 可持续性; 照护