# Low-carbon living takes off in the US

April 8 2008

Cohousing offers a low-carbon lifestyle, and developers are poised for a market that could soon burgeon in the US, according to a new study. Until now, cohousing has occupied a niche market in the US, but the paper by Dr Jo Williams at UCL (University College London) suggests the situation is changing. Cohousing not only helps to halve energy use, it offers health and social benefits for families and older people seeking secure and affordable homes.

Cohousing in the US typically comprises private living units (houses or flats) with shared spaces such as a gym, office space, workshops, laundry facilities and a cafe. Those living in cohousing consume nearly 60 per cent less energy in the home, and operate car-sharing and recycling schemes that greatly reduce the pollution from travel and landfill. Having facilities such as office space, workshops and gym within the community also reduces travel and associated emissions. Residents' direct involvement in the management and maintenance of these communities has also led to the adoption of more energy-efficient systems and renewable sources of energy.

In a paper published in *Futures Journal*, Dr Jo Williams of the UCL Bartlett School of Planning says that until recently, cohousing has occupied a niche market in the US, largely because the development model adopted has been resident-led. The time, money and effort required to invest in such a project, along with the associated risks, has very much restricted market interest. It takes a minimum of five years to develop a cohousing project, the drop-out rate is high and projects can be expensive.

However, new development models have emerged in the US that reduce resident involvement, risk and cost – namely, partnership, speculative and retrofit models. Developers are beginning to finance and build cohousing both in partnership with prospective residents and speculatively. Residents are also forming their own cohousing communities in existing neighbourhoods, by taking down fences, creating communal facilities and taking on the responsibility for general management and maintenance.

Dr Jo Williams of the UCL Bartlett School of Planning says: “The emergence of new models of development has expanded the market for cohousing in the US, particularly in California, Massachusetts, Colorado and Washington DC. The number of households living in retrofit communities has tripled in the last 10 years and the number living in partnership projects has nearly quadrupled. The coverage and diversity of the market has also increased. Re-sale values for properties in cohousing communities are higher than the market average, suggesting they are now desirable places to live. Developers, architects and realtors have recognised the market potential for cohousing and are setting up support services.”

“With concerns about carbon emissions and energy savings, there has never been greater impetus for housing that offers low-carbon lifestyles. If the development models emerging in the US were adopted in the UK, the market for cohousing could be substantially expanded here. This could add to our options for shrinking our carbon footprint as well as meeting social needs, such as safe homes for an ageing population and local childcare facilities for parents who work.”

Source: University College London

Citation: Low-carbon living takes off in the US (2008, April 8) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2008-04-low-carbon.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.