Flip, split or extend – helping ‘mum and dad developers’ navigate housing design processes

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Abstract

How do we apply service design theories to improve the way ‘mum and dad developers’ navigate housing design processes to achieve more liveable house designs in Australia’s middle-ring suburbs?

With over 300,000 people migrating to Australia’s capital cities in 2018/19 alone (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020), there is pressure on our middle ring suburbs to house many of these people. Joining established architects and building designers are ‘mum and dad developers’ who are inspired by their family, friends and reality TV to ‘have a go’ at developing their own land – either by building in their backyard or replacing a family home with smaller villas.

While this can bring benefits, there are a many poor outcomes brought about by a lack of knowledge of how good house design can impact our quality of life – houses designed with no eaves to protect from the sun, poor ventilation, dark rooms, and small unusable gardens with no trees.

House design is influenced by many factors, including the people who design them and the policies which guide them. Government planning departments typically write residential design policies for a narrow audience of building designers and architects, but there is a changing dimension to this. With more ‘mum and dad developers’ getting involved,
they often experience difficulty navigating these policies and processes, and understanding implications of the design decisions they make.

This research looks at ways to address their knowledge gap so they are empowered to make better choices when they work with their building designer or architect. The method for this research uses service design tools to interview users and map journeys through the redevelopment process, identifying pain points and opportunities to improve processes. Emerging findings may involve the production of supporting visual communication materials, the development of virtual assistants or education programs. These ideas propose a collaborative ‘housing design service,’ which provides communities with accessible services to promote engagement with good design.

Keywords: sustainable housing design, democratising public policy, mum and dad developers, urban planning

**Mum-and-dad developer ‘personas’**

The flippers – Buy an old place, refurbish and sell frequently

The extenders – Extend their existing house as the family grows

The splitters – Buy an old place, split the block, build three new houses

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Linköping University Electronic Press
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