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Prefabricated construction

It is rare to pick up the paper without coming across an article regarding housing shortages in Victoria. While the concept of building a 'lego' style structure is not a new one, recent developments in Australian prefabricated construction have demonstrated that new applications for this method of construction could prove useful in meeting Australia's socio-economic needs.

Prefabricated construction is a method of building that involves several factory-built components being assembled onsite to complete the building.

History

The concept of prefabricated housing became popular during World War II in the United Kingdom as a means of quickly and cheaply providing quality housing for displaced citizens. Today, prefabricated construction appeals to developers for the same reasons. The speed at which buildings can be constructed has obvious flow-on effects for reducing costs and facilitating higher volumes of construction.

These benefits have particular relevance to Australia, which is currently facing a massive shortfall in the supply of homes. The National Housing Supply Council has estimated that the shortfall in supply will rise to 308,000 dwellings in just four years and 640,500 in less than 20 years.

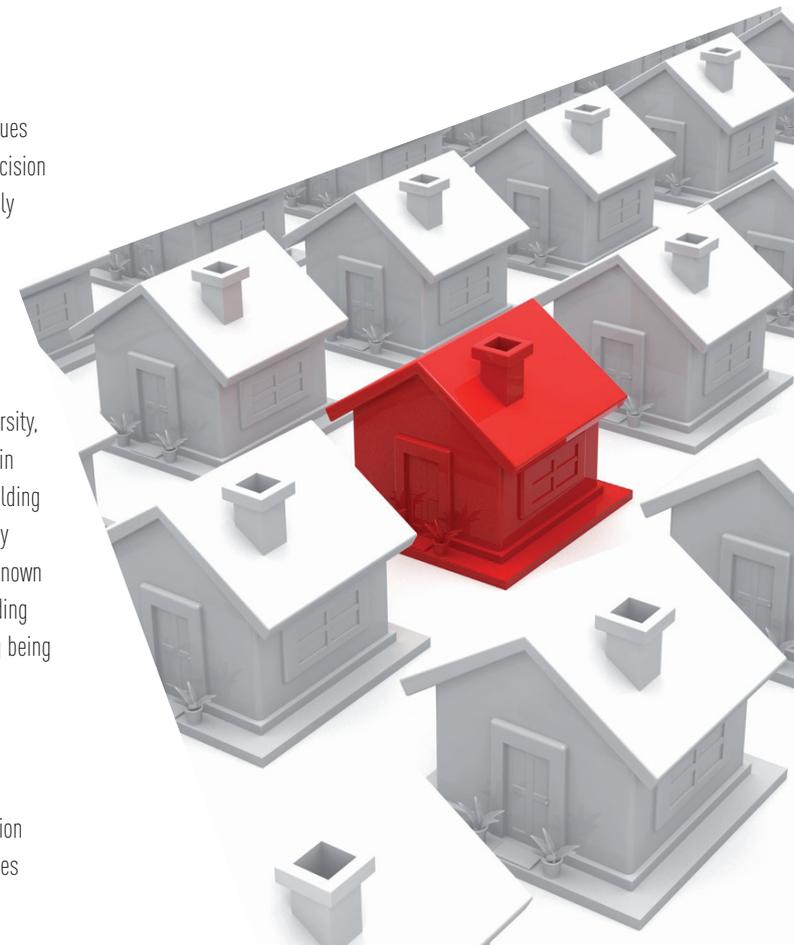
Accordingly, the benefits of using prefabricated construction techniques – the lower construction cost, the speed of construction and the precision of work – may be appropriate for alleviating Australia's housing supply shortage.

Australian examples

2010 has seen two buildings completed in Australia, with more to come using the innovative techniques. In February 2010, an entire university accommodation block opened at Australian National University, making the building the first large-scale application of this method in Australia. A few months later, in May the nine-storey 'Little Hero' building (a residential apartment building) was finished in Melbourne's CBD by United Building, a Melbourne based construction firm led by well known architect Nonda Katsalidis. Remarkably, onsite assembly of the building was completed in just two weeks, as a result of parts of the building being constructed offsite and transported to site for final assembly.

International trends

The prefabricated construction trend appears to be spreading. Using prefabricated construction, the United Kingdom has begun construction on its largest straw bale building for the Sutton Bonington Biosciences



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Building at the University of Nottingham. The building will be the largest of its kind in the UK and has certainly raised the profile of the technology's applications.

Into the future

Prefabricated construction has been hailed by Unitised Building as 'an innovation in construction technology that represents a potential revolution in the building industry'. With the next logical progression being to apply this method to offices, combined commercial/residential buildings and other building sectors, this exciting area is one to watch.

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