



Social Housing in Europe

Edited by

**Kathleen Scanlon, Christine Whitehead &
Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia**

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Social Housing in Europe

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Christine Whitehead is an applied economist whose research is well-known in both academic and policy circles. She directs a multi-disciplinary centre including anthropologists, sociologists and geographers. She has conducted an extensive programme of research on various aspects of the housing market, with special reference to housing finance and subsidies, social housing provision and land-use planning, as well as on urban, industrial policy and privatisation issues. Major themes in her recent research have included analysis of the relationship between planning and housing, notably with respect to the S106 policy; housing needs assessments; the role and financing of social housing in the United Kingdom and Europe; developments in private finance; policy evaluation; and more generally the application of economic concepts and techniques to questions of public resource allocation with respect to housing, education, policing and urban regeneration.

Foreword

Not everyone can buy their own home: the recent subprime crisis sent a cruel reminder of this to governments that prioritise home-ownership. Even for those who can afford it, buying a home may not be wise—early purchase hinders mobility and ties up the household's wealth. And history has shown that over-reliance on owner-occupation can also exacerbate urban sprawl and price volatility.

Even in countries where owner-occupation is the norm, the centres of the largest urban areas are dominated by rented housing—but in spite of this, the social and private rented sectors remain surprisingly neglected by policy makers and are frequently poorly documented.

Rapid urbanisation in emerging countries naturally increases rental demand as the population of cities expands. The market produces rental solutions for households at both extremes of the income distribution. Providing slum housing for the poorest is a highly profitable activity, but housing them in decent conditions is a challenge. This reflects the failure of past public housing experiments, and the idea that the creation and upkeep of good-quality social stock is a luxury that belongs to the golden age of the European welfare states.

But as housing problems grow in both developed and emerging economies, their policy makers look to where social housing was created and is still alive: Europe. This is far from an easy picture to decode: there are 50 or so countries with nearly as many languages, and great diversity (rooted in history and religion) in the built form of housing and in the tenure distribution. Moreover, housing policy has increasingly been delegated to sub-national levels and housing is not an EU competence, which makes it difficult to find comparable statistics—for example, there is no common definition of social housing.

For all these reasons, this publication, which provides a detailed and updated description of the main European models, will be a precious tool for housing researchers and policy makers all over the world: for Europeans in search of greater efficiency, for those in transition countries trying to rebuild and modernise their systems and for those in emerging economies just starting to tackle the issue.

Building on an initiative from the French housing research network '*Socio-économie de l'Habitat*', the London School of Economics has assembled a 'dream team' of economists, sociologists, urban planners and other experts from across the continent. Their output, the result of seven years of seminars and publications, has now been updated and brought together under a single cover. Its double focus—country experiences and thematic

analyses—should enable readers to navigate and make productive use of the information it contains.

Of course, the experience of a given country or region at a given time may not work when transposed elsewhere. The devil is in the details, and context and history are fundamental to an understanding of how and why policies work (or do not). This publication provides the detail and historical perspective necessary for that understanding.

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Acknowledgments

The seed of this book was planted more than 10 years ago, in 2006, when a group of French colleagues organised a series of seminars in four European cities (Paris, Brussels, London and Berlin) through the *GIS Réseau Socio-Économie de l'Habitat* network. Those meetings led to a collection of papers entitled *Social Housing in Europe* (Whitehead and Scanlon eds 2007) whose publication was supported by a grant from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) to the LSE London research centre. Further meetings of the group took place in Paris, Vienna and Dublin. These prompted a second publication (Scanlon and Whitehead eds 2008), also sponsored by HEIF, which covered the broader thematic concerns of the network in relation to social housing's development. The chapters from those two publications form the basis of this book.

Twenty of the original 24 authors have contributed to this volume. We are grateful to them for their continued participation in and commitment to this ongoing (and hopefully, continuing) transnational conversation. We thank *all* the contributors—current and previous—for their hard work and patience with the process of putting together this book. We also thank the following individuals who contributed to its creation, both in its current form and earlier incarnations, with helpful advice, comments and support: Nathalie Boccadoro, Maxime Chodorge, Benoit Filippi, Laurent Ghékiere, Marietta Haffner, John Hills, Ben Kochan, Lena Magnusson Turner and the late Bengt Turner, Marc Uhry and Gill Wedlake. We also extend our thanks to James Burns (<http://jbrawimages.com>), a passionate photographer of social housing architecture in the United Kingdom and elsewhere who generously shared many of the striking images featured here.

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This *Habitation à Loyer Modéré* (HLM) tower in *Les Presles* in the Parisian outskirts of Épinay-sur-Seine is one of the many (47%) social-housing buildings in the quarter. The area is also part of the French 'Sensitive Urban Development Zones', or ZUS (see Chapter 8 in this book).

Photograph: Nicolas Oran.

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Introduction

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For much of the post-war period, the model of social housing was broadly similar across Northern and Eastern Europe: there was a heavy emphasis on state-supported housing construction to overcome the effects of extreme destruction and lack of investment during the war, to accommodate rapidly growing populations, to help bring economies back to some sort of normality and to ensure employment.

The mechanisms for achieving this expansion in housing investment differed between countries. In most of them, local authorities (hereafter referred to as LAs) were heavily involved, either building municipal housing themselves or creating the conditions for independent social landlords to do so. However, the forms of central-government subsidy and intervention were specific to each country, and helped mould longer term approaches to ensuring 'a decent home for every household at a price they could afford'.

The extent to which housing was seen as part of the welfare state – and thus part of the contract between citizens and government – also varied. In Eastern Europe, social housing was very much based on state provision of the social wage and in most of Northern Europe, it was seen as an important part of the welfare-state contract, but in Southern Europe, the policy emphasis was more on supporting family provision of housing – and this meant owner occupation.

Among what might be called the welfare-state economies, the most important distinction was between countries that saw social housing as a mechanism for providing for *all* types of household, and those that emphasised provision for *lower income* households. As numerical housing