

WP 1.3 Housing and Neighbourhood

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With contributions from

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Executive Abstract

Housing and neighbourhood, as one of the most basic and local contexts for social action and interaction, inevitably has substantial potential both to generate social exclusion and to mobilise collective action and the development of formal and informal strategies. In the last two decades of the 20th Century, two almost ubiquitous tendencies have preoccupied both theorists and housing activists in Europe: the withdrawal of the State from housing provision; and the growth of home ownership as the main form of housing provision, as the key focus of housing policy and as the vehicle for the insertion of the middle-class into new spatial territories.

When teasing out the resultant dynamics, it is useful to make a distinction between two forms of exclusion in relation to housing and neighbourhood: exclusion *from* housing; and exclusion *through* housing:

Key Exclusion Dynamics

Exclusion *from* housing:

- Reduction in provision of public housing
- Discriminatory entitlements to housing
- Direct discrimination (race, marital status, etc)
- Lack of social supports, resources to sustain independent living
- Overcrowding
- Poor maintenance
- Insecure tenancies
- Domestic violence
- Lack of culturally appropriate facilities
- Gentrification
- Demolition
- Commercialisation of housing providers
- Ownership-oriented policies

Exclusion *through* housing:

- Concentration of disadvantage in poor neighbourhoods
- Polarisation through location of social housing
- Poor access to transport, services and facilities

Socially Creative Strategies

To combat exclusion *from* housing:

- Neighbourhood-based cooperatives and other small-scale institutions for provision and/or renewal of housing.
- Focus on excluded populations in housing provision
- Informal housing (where regulatory context allows)
- Direct action against relocation/gentrification programmes.

To combat exclusion *through* housing:

- Area-based initiatives in response to shared problems
- Policies and strategies to introduce social mixing
- Extension of housing providers' remit to addressing other forms of exclusion (training, labour market)
- Alternative organisational structures giving tenants more control over housing and neighbourhood development
- Arts and cultural initiatives to challenge negative perceptions and to mobilise resident participation

This report also outlines a number of examples of socially creative approaches to housing provision and neighbourhood development. These come from a variety of contexts and, although the nature of housing markets and regulation in Europe means that few could unambiguously be called ‘bottom-up’ strategies, they do reflect the potential for residents to gain more power and control with respect to their housing.

Lessons from the case studies.

SCS Case Studies

- **Informal housing (Athens)**
 - Weak regulation allowed ‘illegal’ development to meet the housing needs of large influxes of migrant populations to Athens. Many originally informal housing developments have since been formally recognised.
- **Cooperative housing (Quebec and UK)**
 - Can be a substantial housing provider with great potential for democratic engagement and mobilisation of community action beyond housing issue. May also be progressive influence in other areas, such as development of low environmental impact housing
- **Bottom-up organisation (Denmark)**
 - Even the most marginalised groups, such as residents of shelters for the homeless, can participate in control of their own living environment with support of housing and other agencies
- **Neighbourhood initiatives (Sweden)**
 - Housing NGOs have considerable potential to engage in non-housing issues to address the problems of socially-excluded neighbourhoods. These include community development and the promotion of employment opportunities.
- **Arts and culture initiatives (Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal)**
 - While arts-based regeneration is sometimes associated with gentrification, this case study provides an example of a local creative milieu which is tolerant, diverse and democratic, and bring benefits in terms of employment and community identity and self-esteem. It involves a collaboration of local people with creative professionals and amateurs.
- **Neighbourhood renewal and social mix (Bijlmermeer, Netherlands)**
 - This case is one of the largest example in Europe of large-scale renewal of social housing incorporating policies to create more social diversity by the provision of middle-class housing. Beyond massive physical improvements for many existing residents, it provides new housing opportunities for the minority ethnic middle class and incorporates a strong stand of arts and culture, but it also involves the displacement of some of the most marginalised residents.

In both housing provision and renewal, and the regeneration of socially-excluded neighbourhoods, it is the interaction of residents working with formal organisations, especially in the NGO and public sectors that is the most important driver of social

innovation. Crucial to this is the ability of these organisations themselves to be innovative and creative, to have the flexibility and openness to fully engage with residents and to provide both the opportunity for residents to exercise a high degree of control over the future of their housing and neighbourhood, and the supportive framework to help them to do this. Retrenchment in the direct role of the state has left space for more creativity by NGOs and perhaps by communities, but most of the case studies outlined in this paper suggest that bottom-up creativity needs institutional support. A strong welfare state framework may provide the best environment for the active participation of the most marginal, and bottom-up creativity works best when seen as a complement, rather than an alternative, to the welfare state.