



# URBAN REGENERATION IN EUROPE: THE PLACE OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN INTEGRATED URBAN POLICIES

**Current perspectives**

Edited by Darinka Czischke



# Urban regeneration in Europe:

## The place of social housing in integrated urban policies

### Current perspectives

Edited by Darinka Czischke

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## Foreword

Dear Reader,

What role does social housing play in creating successful, sustainable places? In an environment where almost everything to do with housing is under review, where there is an increasingly mixed economy of provision, where there is huge pressure to meet the supply gap and where individual and public resources are made scarce by the economic crisis, this question must be at the centre of future policy.

It should therefore also be discussed by the research community, which helps practitioners and decision-makers to find appropriate answers to the crucial challenges related to sustainable communities and housing, especially sustainable urban development.

The essays in this volume reflect on key topics regarding urban transformations taking place in Europe, and the place that social housing has in fostering more liveable, sustainable communities. In particular, the focus is on the role of integrated urban policies to achieve this. This publication is part of the work that has been carried out by the CECODHAS European Social Housing Observatory over the last two years on “the future of social housing in the EU”.

The authors examine the social, cultural and regeneration challenges common to most European cities, despite the local differences. They put into perspective urban regeneration developments, in particular given common trends increasingly affecting most of Europe, such as climate change and the challenges of energy efficiency, economic crisis and its impact on the construction sector and more specifically, on housing affordability.

Living together in harmony is not a fashionable challenge; despite pressing issues such as the economic crisis, we should not forget what underpins sustainable communities, namely the quality of social relations and the skills needed to manage those communities. This publication is a compelling and important contribution to a better understanding of the role of housing and housing providers in this context.



**David Orr**

*President of CECODHAS  
Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, England*



The David Beckham Academy

Peninsula Square

North Greenwich

The O<sub>2</sub>

Historic Greenwich

Sainsbury

Mileage Village

Southern Park



# Introduction

## **Darinka Czischke**

*Research Director, CECODHAS European Social Housing Observatory*

Since 2006, the CECODHAS European Social Housing Observatory has invited researchers and practitioners in the field of social housing once a year to reflect on the future of social housing in the European Union. The outcomes of these discussions have been documented in two publications, each bringing together the contributions of the aforementioned experts and practitioners to the colloquia organised by the Observatory on this topic. The first colloquium was held in Brussels in 2006 and addressed the economic dimension of the problem under the title: *“Current Developments in Housing Policies and Housing Markets in Europe: Implications for the Social Housing Sector”*. The following year, a second edition of the colloquia was held in Barcelona, and focused on the social dimension, under the title *“Welfare Transformation and Demographic Change in Europe: Challenges for the Social Housing Sector”*.

In 2008, the Observatory asked a number of researchers to address a third dimension of the ‘future of social housing in the EU’, namely the

‘urban’ dimension. The latter aimed at bringing together the social and economic dimensions while focusing on their effects in concrete places. The essays collected in this publication therefore look at how trends in markets, policies and social developments are reflected in space. But most importantly, the aim this time was to address a number of crucial questions related to the role of social housing actors in fostering sustainable urban communities.

The discussions held at the aforementioned colloquia highlighted a number of trends that are re-shaping the demand for social housing, and hence the type of neighbourhoods and/or communities where this housing is located. In some countries, trends towards the segmentation of social housing by income are becoming stronger, resulting in high concentrations of very vulnerable groups. This situation has brought about a number of negative effects, such as the stigmatisation of these neighbourhoods, the decline in the quality of service provision, and overall, cycles of urban and social decline. In order to counter-act these tendencies, many countries have adopted policies aimed at facilitating social integration of people of different social backgrounds through, for example, the implementation of the ‘social mix’ approach. Nevertheless, substantial debate in urban and housing studies questions the real outcomes and merits of these

approaches to urban regeneration and social housing provision. (Bailey et al; van Bergeijk; van Kempen 2008; Tunstall et al 2006)

It is worth noting that, despite the diversity of definitions of what 'social mix' constitutes across Europe, in this publication we refer to it as the policy aim to have people from different social, economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds living together in harmony, without predominance of either group's culture and norms over the others, and where respect, tolerance and, in some places, even a sense of celebration of that very diversity are found. While in the UK social mix is usually equated to mixed *tenure* (although in some cases, policy and research focus on 'mixed income' communities as well), in other parts of Europe, like in the Netherlands and in France, for example, the emphasis tends to be more on ethnic or cultural mix. Hence, in this publication we have kept a broad definition of social mix, while each author provides his/her idea of mix in their respective articles.

Furthermore, while in the past social housing was considered part of the solution to social problems, today in some countries social housing is seen as 'part of the problem' of areas in decline. Moreover, within a European policy framework that stresses the need for 'integrated urban policies', it seems necessary to rethink the role of

social housing in urban regeneration policies so as to assess the full potential for its contribution to being 'part of the solution'. So far, it appears that this debate lacks real evidence and rigorous reflection. Hence, in this volume we have invited some leading scholars in this field across Europe, to help shed light on the relative merits of current policy approaches to social housing and urban regeneration.

The first two authors reflect on **policy measures to achieve sustainable urban regeneration of deprived areas**. While Nicholas Falk reviews the applicability of lessons from European case studies to the UK sustainable communities' agenda, Karien Dekker focuses on how to turn around failed early post war neighbourhoods (suffering from physical and social problems). Falk reviews the challenges for mixed communities in the UK (and also possibly for other parts of Europe) emerging from the evidence he collected from case studies of best practice from across the continent. Dekker draws on her experience as programme manager of RESTATE, a major EU-funded research project that investigated social and physical conditions for the regeneration of large housing estates across Europe, and discusses policy measures to counteract negative developments in early post-war neighbourhoods in the Netherlands.

The last two authors, John Flint and Gerard van Bortel, tackle the **governance of social housing**, more specifically how recent changes in the regulatory and governance framework in their respective countries (UK and the Netherlands) are impacting on the ability of social housing providers to deliver sustainable urban regeneration. Last but not least, the conclusion chapter aims to extract the main common issues highlighted by the different essays, and lays out key challenges emerging from these contributions for the future of social housing in terms of its contribution to being 'part of the solution' for more balanced and sustainable communities.

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## PERSPECTIVES

### Achieving Balanced Communities: Challenges and Responses

*Nicholas Falk*

#### Introduction

Faced with a collapse of housing investment and unachievable development objectives, public organisations like England's new Homes and Communities Agency will have to rethink priorities, and reconsider what building sustainable communities is really all about. Some will question whether the idea of mixed communities was ever feasible, while others will be arguing that other goals, such as tackling climate change or economic decline are far more pressing. It is therefore going to be more important than ever to show that we not only know how to build good houses but also neighbourhoods that will stand the test of time, and where people from different backgrounds can live in harmony. If we fail, we may lose all confidence in our capacity to manage change, and the trends towards polarisation and break-down will win out. It is therefore timely to review recent British experience in developing places where people from different social backgrounds can live together

in harmony, as well as contrasting the situation with European experience, which seems much more successful.

To meet the need for some practical guidance, English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation commissioned URBED (Urban and Economic Development) to draw up a good practice guide that could be used for staff training. Working with experts from the University of Westminster (Nick Bailey and Tony Manzi), who had already produced reports on mixed communities for the Chartered Institute of Housing, we started by summarising the extensive literature, which raised a number of serious challenges for making mixed communities work. URBED then interviewed experts, and six path-setting schemes were written up as case studies.<sup>1</sup> We also asked PRP, a leading social housing architectural practice, to pull together advice on service charges, drawing in particular on the experience of Notting Hill Housing Association.

We found planners and private developers as well as social housing providers need help in tackling the management issues involved with mixed communities. Too often the issues are left to the last moment, as soft issues carry less weight than hard issues, such as access roads

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<sup>1</sup> Caterham Village Surrey; Craigmillar Edinburgh; Hulme Manchester; Greenwich Millennium Village London; New Gorbals Glasgow; and Park Central Birmingham.

and drains. Occupants then move in without any idea of how much the service charge will be, how communal areas are to be maintained, or what kinds of people are going to be their neighbours. This leads to social tensions and at its worst, regeneration schemes follow their predecessors, and end up as 'ghettoes', despite the original intentions of enabling different types of people to live together.

This summary of the research findings and guidance starts by reviewing the challenges for mixed communities. It then draws lessons from the case studies of good practice. Finally it suggests what needs to be done in a situation where house-building is collapsing, and where difficult investment choices have to be made.<sup>2</sup>

## Why management matters

Though there is evidence, for example from research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to show mixed communities can work once they have settled down, there are also plenty of problems that need to be solved, particularly in the early days.<sup>3</sup> Even relative success stories like the new town of Milton Keynes went through a pe-

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<sup>2</sup> The full draft good practice guide, literature review and case studies can be accessed on URBED's web site [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk). Comments would be welcomed, as well as requests to reuse any of the material.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Nick Bailey et al Creating and maintaining mixed income communities: a good practice guide, JRF 2006

riod that the press called 'New Town blues' and similar feelings of 'grief' have been documented recently in the new community of Cambourne, just outside Cambridge.<sup>4</sup> Even where the new housing replaces unpopular Council estates, the social challenges are every bit as complex as the physical ones. Lynne Hanley, in her personal account of living on *Estates*, talks about the need to break down the 'walls' that make Council tenants feel worse about themselves.<sup>5</sup> Yet she grew up at a time when most men living in social housing went out to work.

Planners now have to address 'residualisation' where those at the top of the list for social housing are often single parent families that are workless and vulnerable, and therefore find it hard to cope with living in a new settlement without proper support. At the same time the number of one person households doubled from 3 to 7 million between 1971 and 2005, and many of these end up renting flats bought from 'buy to let' investors in new settlements, or are likely to go for shared ownership because they cannot afford to compete in the wider housing market.

Because neighbours in new communities often have little in common, what is called 'bridging

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Platt's research into the experience of Cambourne can be accessed on the Inspire East web site.

<sup>5</sup> Lynne Hanley, *Estates: an intimate history*, Granta Books 2007

social capital' is needed to create links across social groups and neighbourhoods, and this has to be paid for somehow. The 'well-integrated mix' called for in former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's Sustainable Communities Plan requires careful planning to rebalance neighbourhoods if extremes are to be avoided, as well as management plans to ensure that some kind of balance is maintained over time.

Building mixed communities that work requires all the stakeholders to behave differently and often nothing less than a 'step change' is called for. Of course there are some good examples in the UK, for example in Newcastle and Gateshead, of setting up partnerships in which different agencies collaborate in managing a regeneration programme. But comparative case studies show that Britain lags behind other European countries in devolving powers to local authorities, and in working together for the common good.<sup>6</sup> The UK now needs to learn from countries such as the Netherlands and in Scandinavia that have built much more social and rented housing and achieved more sustainable outcomes without excessive house price inflation. The outcomes have created safe and attractive places with social infrastructure within walking and cycling distance, which helps to produce

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6 Regeneration in European Cities: making connections, URBED for JRF 2008 [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk)

much happier children as well as keeping travel and energy consumption down.<sup>7</sup>

As the qualities of leadership and project management required are still rare within local authorities, according to the Egan Review<sup>8</sup>, support is needed from national public agencies to achieve the changes in behaviour required. These can include allocating time for training, and joining networks, and study tours to look and learn from places that work, rather than just relying on published guidance. Achieving the benefits of a balanced community requires more than just providing a few community facilities or a community development worker. Coordinated action needs to be written into management plans that carry weight long after long after the initial developers and designers have passed on at three different spatial levels:

- **domestic**, for example ensuring that people get on with their neighbours and do not produce excessive noise or waste
- **communal**, for example providing spaces where people can meet for informal interaction and where children can play unsupervised

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7 Beyond Ecotowns, PRP Design for Homes and URBED. 2008, [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk)

8 The Egan Review of the skills needed to implement the Sustainable Communities Plan led to the formation of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (reborn as the Homes and Communities Academy) and a number of Regional Centres of Excellence.

- and at the **neighbourhood** levels, which includes support systems for those with social needs and transport to access jobs and other opportunities.

Issues of management or governance are often treated in ideological terms, such as securing accountability, whereas the form of management ought to match the situation and what members of the community actually want. Our case studies were carefully selected to cover different types of places and different types of manage-

ment. Thus an asset endowed development trust can work well in a relatively well-off place like Caterham Village in Surrey, but would be harder to establish where development values are low and middle class families are in a minority. By contrast in areas with high levels of deprivation, such as Hulme Manchester, on the spot neighbourhood management is required to bring together social, education and environmental services, which makes local authority involvement essential. The differences in management tasks are brought out in the boxes below.

#### Box 1: **Neighbourhood and estate renewal e.g. Attwood Green, Central Birmingham (now called Park Central)**

- decanting and re-housing existing tenants while redevelopment is under way
- working with community organisations to build self-confidence and employability
- allocating new housing to those who will benefit most
- attracting higher income families to live in the neighbourhood
- generating a positive new image for a once failed area
- dealing with the needs of households on low incomes, and vulnerable groups, including older people
- managing communal spaces to higher standards
- setting up effective neighbourhood management
- establishing local area agreements



### Box 2: **Area regeneration e.g. Hulme, Manchester**

- dealing with social problems that can blight an area, such as drug and alcohol abuse
- ensuring personal and property security providing the quality of services to encourage mobile groups to stay
- rebuilding the local economy and engaging the 'workless'
- promoting social and racial cohesion
- facilitating resident involvement and delegating decision-making
- involving 'hard-to-reach' groups, such as immigrants and those with poor language skills

### Box 3: **Brown-field development e.g. Greenwich Millennium Village, London**

- dealing with contaminated land
- relocating non-conforming uses
- stimulating demand, for example through natural features such as water or historic buildings
- upgrading transport links
- creating a forum for involving people who want to live in the new community
- developing social infrastructure to support a growing community
- managing a public realm which may include strategic open space e.g. waterfronts
- creating mutual benefits and positive connections between the new and existing communities
- dealing with the needs of households on low incomes, including young families
- considering flexible uses of property including concepts such as 'Lifetime Homes'

#### Box 4: Green-field development/urban extensions e.g. Northstowe new town, near Cambridge

- responding to local objections to new housing
- providing social infrastructure at the right time
- building local authority capacity to handle major schemes
- creating positive interaction between the new and existing communities
- implementing new environmental technologies e.g. Combined Heat and Power (CHP)
- encouraging environmentally conscious behaviour e.g. reducing car use
- establishing development trusts and other vehicles for community ownership

It can be daunting to realise how many different tasks are involved in developing a balanced community (which is why the good practice guide sets out a series of choices or decisions which could be made sequentially). It is also hard to set enough money aside for developing social capital in the face of demands to fund the hard infrastructure. However developing social capital needs to be seen as an investment that adds value, not as an optional extra. Its value can be monitored through the take-up of housing and customer attitude surveys, as well as through indicators such as turnover, property values, and even demands on local health services.

#### What leads to success?

We identified four principles that are in line with the Egan Review of skills, and which lead to long-term success, along with a number of proven tools that can be applied, which are set out with examples in the draft good practice guide, the glossary alone contains over a hundred different terms! However, good management should not just be seen as a 'tick box' exercise. Management in place-making depends on leadership in setting priorities, then breaking complex objectives down into manageable tasks, picking the right tool for the job, and monitoring outcomes. Below are some examples from the case studies to illustrate the principles and some of the available tools.

### ✓ *Fair for everyone and well-served*

Problems soon arise when residents in different tenures feel they are being unfairly treated. Higher density schemes that require lifts and entrance halls inevitably call for maintenance and disputes over who should pay for what. The problems can be minimised by engaging with communities from the start, funding social infrastructure through an agreed strategic plan, using choice based lettings as in the Netherlands (not simply allocating social housing according to some form of points), and giving everyone a stake. Our case studies involved tools such as the community trust at Caterham Barracks turning an old chapel into a children's play centre as an interim use that helped build bridges between the new and the existing communities. In Park Central in Birmingham, an estate renewal project, there is a time limited equity scheme for first time buyers. Hulme's housing association gives priority to people with local or economic connections.

### ✓ *A mixed and integrated community*

One of the best ways of making mixed communities work is to ensure that the schools act as 'community hubs' so that children grow up with a wider range of role models. Masterplans and development briefs showed that each phase of a development has an appropriate tenure

mix. Local Lettings Plans then showed that the principles and original vision to ensure long-term stability are maintained. They should feedback into the design so that there is a sufficient range of size and types of unit to allow people to move within a neighbourhood when their needs and circumstances change. We discovered that in Greenwich Millennium Village problems arose when people moved in who did not understand that for example, cars were supposed to be parked on the edge, and when too few larger homes were built, those with growing families are forced to move out. Good linkages to local jobs and services are always vital, and residents in Caterham are given a bus pass funded through the service charge to get them used to using public transport, which is an excellent way of creating a sense of community. Covenants on the land or their equivalent can be used to ensure standards of behaviour are maintained, with the same standards applying to everyone (and Community Land Trusts can help ensure that covenants are passed on as residents change).

### ✓ *Clean green and safe*

Places often fail because the public realm – the spaces between buildings – is neglected, and 'broken windows' or graffiti quickly multiply. Supercaretakers are being employed in some places to fix problems quickly, and the Optima Housing

Association at Park Central in Birmingham has set up its own maintenance organisation which covers the whole estate. Having lots of children facilities for different ages is crucial. UNICEF found that children are happier in countries such as the Netherlands; and in part this could be because the communal facilities are surrounded by buildings rather than being isolated on the edge. As a result children learn to socialise from an early age. A number of British schemes are starting to use environmental trusts to look after larger areas of public space and these tend be better than local authorities in involving different parts of the community in voluntary work. Smarter forms of parking in communal areas or on the street can be combined with measures to encourage walking and cycling so that cars do not predominate. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems are a great way of not only minimising water run-off but also creating places that are a pleasure to walk around. Vauban and Rieselfeld in Freiburg provide some of the best models, and examples like Upton in Northants show that the principles can be replicated but also that is difficult to agree who is responsible for maintenance.

### ✓ *Responsive ongoing management*

The best communities are built together, and this requires some way of funding the ongoing costs. The extra costs involved in high density development can create a further poverty trap, due to the costs of maintaining lifts and entrance halls. These are most easily resolved by allocating houses to needy families, and using the flats for those with higher incomes (as in the Park Central scheme in Birmingham where all share the use of a fine communal park). Allocation Agreements, as for example in Craigmillar in Edinburgh, and a policy of 'sensitive lettings' avoid people with conflicting lifestyles having to live as neighbours. Extra support needs to be provided for those that need it, such as those with a problem of drug dependency, and this should be built into the management plan, not argued over after problems have arisen. New models such as Commonhold Associations, Community Land Trusts and Cohousing are starting to be used to build a sense of community and ensure places do not deteriorate for lack of care and maintenance. Some inspiration can be drawn from the lasting success of communities like Letchworth Garden City or the post-war Span estates. Again we have a long way to go to match common practice on the Continent, where it is much more common to live in rented property with professional landlords.

## What can be done?

The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse is quoted as saying *'Accomplish the great task by a series of small acts'* Risks can be minimised through advance planning, and there are four areas where action upfront should make subsequent developments much easier:

### 1. Meaningful partnership agreements

Experts we consulted consider that success in achieving balanced communities is largely down to a strong framework established from the outset. Conflicts can be minimised by setting up the right arrangements early on, such as clustering social housing and agreeing a management plan, or using trusts to avoid house-owners opting out of the leasehold enfranchisement. Partnership agreements should also ensure that social infrastructure such as schools are phased to match and support the development of housing. Local authorities will need to play a much more proactive role in future, including making investments and not assuming that everything they want can be secured through Section 106 obligations.

### 2. Creative community involvement

Community activists we consulted feel strongly that community involvement is about far more than holding occasional meetings between the developers and a few of the residents. Market surveys and housing capacity studies at the start help identify the kinds of people who are going to be moving in, and create an initial forum. Charters and development frameworks can draw in people with an interest in the results (rather than just those living locally who are often against change). These are likely to become the pioneers to set up the initial community facilities long before there is sufficient demand to support commercial endeavours such as pubs or shops. Local project offices with large models of what the scheme will eventually look like (as in Dutch schemes we have studied) also provide the space for residents' forums to meet and establish the human contacts that are so important. So too can development trusts and in some cases community councils. An important area for innovation is through cohousing and the involvement of different forms of housing cooperatives. These are used much more extensively in other European countries, and the success of Vauban and Rieselfeld in Freiburg is in part due to the fact that as

much as a third of the housing was commissioned by the eventual occupants, who also took on responsibility for the communal areas.<sup>9</sup> Catering for a wider range of tenures helps speed up the development and occupation processes.

### 3. Quality housing management

The social profile and some of the demands on estate management can be influenced by nomination agreements and charters but there is still a need to fund and control maintenance costs. There is a strong case for common maintenance of the communal areas, as in Park Central, and housing associations often do the job better and cheaper than private companies. The responsibilities need to be sorted out before the first occupant moves in, and in the case of regeneration areas, the local authority needs to take on the ongoing responsibility of maintaining standards to avoid the place declining when development is completed. In Europe, systems for waste storage and collection and local energy supply, as in Hammarby Sjostad, make new settlements much more attractive

places to live.<sup>10</sup> The early housing associations relied on intensive housing management to raise standards of behaviour, (and in the case of Hampstead Garden Suburb failure to keep the hedges cut could lead to eviction!). With the breakdown of traditional communities, something similar may be called for today if only to stop the behaviour of a few individuals causing a whole neighbourhood to suffer.

### 4. Active neighbourhood management

Where new housing is in locations where jobs are in short supply and deprivation is commonplace, much more effort must be put into community development and training with personal development programmes that address the roots of worklessness, which include low self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness. A common complaint is that housing schemes feel dead most of the time because there is no-one in the streets, and here the design and management of facilities such as schools and shops becomes vital so that those with time on their hands do not sink into depression. The experience of innovative projects such as Greenwich

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<sup>9</sup> The Showcase web site provided by the Housing and Communities Agency features case studies of Freiburg and Amersfoort.

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<sup>10</sup> Dutch settlements offer good models, see Beyond Ecotowns, but probably the most inspiring example is Hammarby Sjostad on the edge of Stockholm, which is the subject of a film produced by Design for Homes [www.designforhomes.co.uk](http://www.designforhomes.co.uk)

Millennium Village show this involves much more than simply designing and building social infrastructure early on, as running an extended school places extra demands on the school's staff. In the UK, management (and local finance) have tended to be poor relations of planning and design. They should be seen as equal partner, which would add more value than it costs.

## Conclusions

The field of housing and development is always changing. The current financial crisis will force compromises to be made, which could lead to making the same kinds of mistakes the UK made with system built housing and tower blocks that had to be pulled down before they ever paid their way, as in Hulme in Manchester. Yet the crisis could also lead to breakthroughs, particularly if we built new settlements that not only work as well as neighbourhoods, but carries a premium because they offer families a better quality of life (which is where the original New Towns scored).

There are a number of messages for policy makers

- While the economic down-turn will intensify social tensions, the building of new communities in the right places offers one of the best ways of restarting the economy and making progress towards creating better and more sustainable neighbourhoods. A fundamental aim of the Housing and Communities Agency should be to intervene where the public sector can add most value, as it has both the powers and remit to combine social with physical actions.
- Progress depends on paying more attention to management than we have in the past. As

well as budgeting adequate amounts for investment in community development, ways must be found of funding the ongoing costs. Local authorities who are taking on the role of 'place-making' need to link this with efforts to establish neighbourhood management, and not rely on government initiatives, or Section 106 negotiations to fund short-term posts. This calls for innovation in how the uplift in land values from development and growth are tapped to provide incentives for local authorities (and Energy Supply Companies) to provide better services in the form of energy, waste and water so that overall new settlements offer better value for money than those they replace.

- Time and money needs to go into building capacity among all concerned so that we learn from previous experience, and avoid making the same old mistakes. We no longer have the resources to waste in inter-departmental disputes or planning disputes, and cannot depend on the private sector to do much more than build homes efficiently. Social housing providers are on the 'front line', and should be playing a leading role in managing service provision. They would be helped by a more determined effort to join up social and physical investment (for example through the use of Local and Multi Area Agreements and the

kinds of contractual arrangements that the French and the Dutch have pioneered.) Rather than over-dependence on centralised edits and guidance, we need to encourage the use of charters, protocols and concordats that enable people to 'look and learn together'<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth, which was shortlisted for a 2009 RTPi Award, provides a possible model for learning across sectoral boundaries. [www.cambridgeshirehoirzons.org.uk](http://www.cambridgeshirehoirzons.org.uk)





# Policy measures to tackle urban regeneration in early post-war neighbourhoods: A reflection from the Netherlands

***Karien Dekker***

## Introduction

This essay discusses policy measures to counteract negative developments in early post-war neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. The broader theoretical framework is based on a variety of theories on neighbourhood deprivation. In addition, the article presents illustrations from Hoograven, an early post-war neighbourhood in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Early post-war neighbourhoods receive considerable policy attention in the Netherlands. However, policies in this field are usually expensive and very demanding for the parties involved: local administration, private developers, housing corporations, welfare organisations and residents. In the Netherlands, as well as in the UK, many policies focus on demolition and renewal with the aim of creating socially mixed neighbourhoods. The negative side-effects of these policies (e.g.

‘waterbed’ effects<sup>12</sup>, malfunctioning social fabric, etc.) sometimes raise questions with respect to their viability. Is demolition the right policy option, or are other choices available? In this essay, I argue that the answer depends on the situation and hence a thorough analysis is needed before action is taken. Policy decisions are often taken on the basis of common sense and the need for politicians to raise their visibility rather than as a result of thorough analysis. This essay seeks to help better steer these decisions.

The essay is based on my experience as a programme manager of the EU-funded RESTATE (Restructuring Large Housing Estates in Europe) project, as well as on numerous visits to the neighbourhood of New Hoograven with foreign researchers as well as with students on the ‘Policy and Evaluation Research’ course at Utrecht University. Each year, about 50 students analyze the process and effectiveness of all policies that are implemented in this neighbourhood, giving me the opportunity to have a bird’s eye view of the overall effect of the policies. For many years Hoograven featured amongst the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city of Utrecht. However, it was recently not chosen to be among the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city and the country. Paradoxically, this was a disappoint-

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Waterbed effects’ refer to problems affecting one area being ‘pushed’ into and adjacent neighbourhood through a policy intervention.

ment to the policymakers, who have obviously done their work too well; but not being among the most deprived neighbourhoods meant a loss of funding for the area.

## Understanding causes of neighbourhood deprivation

I teach my students that a good quality policy starts with a thorough analysis of the causes of the problems, and I want to say the same here. There is a multitude of theoretical models that can be used to analyze what causes neighbourhood deprivation: physical decay that precedes social downgrading (Newman 1972), social and / or physical problems that require better management and cause a loss of tenants' confidence (Power 1997), residential dynamics (i.e. some residents move out, whereas others move in as the cause of neighbourhood deprivation) (Grigsby *et al.* 1987), social, economic and technical characteristics together with location, environment, services and reputations (Prak and Priemus 1985). However, every model has its advantages and disadvantages. The model of Prak and Priemus, for example, is one of the most comprehensive and well known models for explaining changing situations in post-war housing estates. However, the model does not include some essential elements, such as social structure, public

space and governance. Murie (2005) builds on the Prak and Priemus model and adds location, position on the housing market, and economic development to explain neighbourhood development. By summarizing all these models and adding my own experience, I argue that the quality of the following four issues influences the kinds of policies that may be useful:

1. **Physical design:** quality of the housing stock, public spaces, accessibility
2. **Population characteristics:** employment, education, income of the population, social cohesion, values and norms, neighbourhood attachment.
3. **Management:** legislation, financial issues, coordination of activities.
4. **Context:** local housing market, economic development of the region.

I will now discuss each of these issues in more detail:

### 1. Physical design

The poor quality of the physical aspects of early post-war neighbourhoods is the most frequent reason given for demolition. The quality of the materials and the initial design can be out of date or poor. The lack of quality can refer to the

internal design, such as inadequate central heating, sanitary equipment, or damp. It can also refer to the urban design; high density building, problems with anonymous urban space, inaccessibility of the estate because of poor roads or poor public transport, etc. In any case, physical deterioration is highly visible and can create feelings of uneasiness or discomfort. If the physical quality is poor, refurbishment or demolition is probably the right decision.

Demolition of part of the housing stock in a neighbourhood has a couple of advantages: the position on the housing market (see below) can

be improved, newer types of housing can be built, new commercial and other activities can be attracted and the population can be changed (see below). Depending on the purpose of the demolition, not just physical but social policies are usually implemented simultaneously. The disadvantages of demolition, however, are manifold. It is expensive and demands significant management capacity of the parties involved, which may be a reason why demolition projects may take a decade or more to take shape. As soon as there are large financial sums involved, decision-making turns out to be very difficult.

#### Box 5: **The project “Heart of Hoograven” as an example of difficult cooperation.**

Already in 1995 a start was made with the planning of the demolition of a shopping centre with shops above it. The parties involved were the social housing provider Mitros (owner of the housing stock), the local administration (owner of the land), service providers, shop owners, and a private developer. It took ten years of negotiation, and a loss and regain of trust between the partners, before the final financial plan could be signed. In the end, the land was sold to the housing corporation, who sold on the land and the old housing blocks to the developer. The developer could then finally demolish the houses and start building the single family houses in the owner occupied sector, as well as rented apartments above a shopping centre. The houses have all been sold, despite the credit crunch (January 2009).

It is not unusual that the process of demolition takes a very long time, a period in which a neighbourhood is confronted with a high degree of insecurity about the future, continuous changing landscapes and new situations. The result may be a loss of social cohesion, and tensions between residential groups may present more problems than solutions. A lack of investment in the existing properties may create unattractive situations such as physical deterioration, disinterest of residents, but also crime. Measures such as putting up uniform curtains, appointment of a concierge, as well as helping the residents to organize themselves may prevent the worst scenarios.

All-in-all demolition is a drastic measure that disturbs the social fabric, brings in high costs and should only be chosen if there are no other ways to create change in a neighbourhood. Usually demolition is only a solution if the problems with the quality, maintenance or the design of the dwellings are so large that refurbishment is insufficient.

Refurbishment refers to physical measures that improve the structure and the surroundings of the dwellings that create a modern appearance and improve the energy balance. Examples are improvements of the dwellings (new kitchen, balcony, bathroom, living room), safer public spaces (communal entries, galleries, public spaces) and improvement of the service level (central heating, elevators).

#### Box 6: **An example of refurbishment: The Rietveld area in Hoograven.**

Social housing provider Bo-Ex decided to refurbish its property, rather than demolish it. The inside of the apartments is to be modernized, and the outside to be renovated back into the style that architect Rietveld (well known for his chairs and for the Rietveld Schröder House) once designed them in. The purpose of the renovation is to provide the residents with a home that gives them a feeling of pride. The residents do not have to move out of their houses during the renovation, and the costs of refurbishment are relatively low when compared to demolition.



## 2. Population characteristics

Some housing estates are confronted with concentrations of low-income households, ethnic minorities and residents with low levels of education. A concentration of such households may trigger or contribute to antisocial behaviour, noise, crime and poor social relations. These concentrations are often the result of an out-migration of those that can afford to leave the area (medium income, white, educated house-

holds) and an immigration of those that have less choice (low income, ethnic minorities, low educated households).

If a large part of the population has low levels of education and/or is unemployed, attention to their situation is often part of the policy to improve the neighbourhood. Without an improved position on the housing market, physical improvements may be futile.

### Box 7: Projects targeting Youngsters in Hoograven: limited outcomes

In Hoograven the number of projects that target youngsters is countless: a back to school project, a neighbourhood sports project, the extended school day, a Moroccan football club, a youth centre, Moroccan fathers project, Youngsters' Turn, CCTV, removal of street furniture, a mobile youth centre in the shape of an ICT bus, a Johan Cruyff court, youngsters' meeting place, and so on and so forth. In most projects the local administration finances, and the local welfare organization implements. However, the problem is still not solved and young boys feel attracted to the group of teenagers hanging out in the streets.

Often the local labour market is highly influenced by national factors, but also local factors may play a role. As a result, the neighbourhood may be isolated, which diminishes the residents' chances of education or work. Local policies that aim to improve access to the labour market can only partially solve these problems.

Furthermore, youth unemployment and school drop outs may cause serious challenges to the

feelings of safety of other residents. If groups of youngsters hang out on the streets they become bored, the group values prevail over mainstream values, and criminal behaviour easily ensues. Local administrations and social housing providers both profit from lower levels of youth unemployment and school drop outs, hence they often finance and coordinate activities by local welfare organisations.

In the Netherlands, as well as in the UK, a lack of social cohesion is regarded to be the cause of problems such as a lack of social contacts, deviant behaviour, a lack of social control; and solidarity among residents. Indeed, social cohesion

can help create stronger feelings of safety; social problems can be solved; and physical deprivation may be prevented. Yet, it is important to realize that too much cohesion within a group may cause the exclusion of other groups.

**Box 8: “Our Neighbourhood’s Turn”: a successful national program in creating more cohesive communities.**

Essential in this project’s success is the active participation of the residents in the design phase of the policies, as well as in activities that enhance social cohesion. The activities are funded by the national government, but they demand the cooperation of the local administration, housing corporations, schools, services, and so on. With the help of an external project manager, eight projects were listed:

1. A neighbourhood website;
2. Information centre;
3. Kids–café with activities for parents and children;
4. Youngsters needed a place to meet and got a bus with ICT facilities;
5. Youngsters organize a music festival;
6. Residents, local administration and housing corporations redesign the communal gardens in between the apartment blocks;
7. Moroccan neighbourhood fathers are frequently in the streets and organize activities for youngsters;
8. Parents, schools, local administration and police cooperate to create safer and cleaner schools.

Part of the success of the project is due to the open and transparent attitude of the externally hired project manager that was capable of attracting many difficult-to-reach groups in the design phase of the project. The downside of the approach is that mainly his network was activated, whereas others were not invited.

### 3. Management

In some early post-war neighbourhoods the situation is relatively good, and demolition or refurbishment may not be needed. If the location is not too bad, the neighbourhood does not hold the lowest position on the housing market, and the physical conditions are reasonable, then just improvements in the management can make a significant difference. Moreover, in case of demolition or refurbishment better management is also needed.

Legislation with respect to ownership can be a major issue, since it is not always clear who owns which part of the public space. Also coordination of maintenance of the public space and housing blocks, both financially and in terms of planning, can improve the quality of the neighbourhood. Coordinating maintenance activities can be a complex process because responsibilities are not always clear. Especially if there are several owners in the neighbourhood (social housing provider, local administration, individual owner-occupiers, etc.) the process of planning and coordinating can be time-consuming and burdensome. Yet, it is worth the trouble because it makes management more efficient and effective. For example, it is not very efficient if the housing corporation cleans its rose gardens on Tuesdays and the local services clean the streets

on Thursdays. Litter, contrary to ownership, doesn't stop at the end of the rose gardens.

Furthermore, at the larger scale coordination and management are crucial. Issues such as planning and monitoring of the effects of the housing admission system, prevention of vacant dwellings, maintenance and repair, treatment of undesired behaviour of tenants, dealing with rent deficiencies, can only be dealt with in a coordinated manner.



## 4. Context

The context of the housing estate is of crucial importance, although this is often not acknowledged in area-based programs. The regional housing market influences the relative position and reputation of the housing estate. This in turn influences the way one should analyze the problems in an estate. An example may clarify this: an estate with relatively large and well maintained multi-family housing in one region can be very attractive, whereas the same estate with similar characteristics in another, less densely populated area may have a low position

on the housing market. Also, if a region is characterized by economic decline and many people leave to find employment elsewhere, then vacant dwellings may be the result. Moreover, if new neighbourhoods are developed with new and good quality housing the relative quality of the housing in early post-war neighbourhoods declines. It may also result in those who can afford to leave to the new neighbourhoods doing so, leaving the poorest households behind. Therefore, the local context is of crucial importance in the analysis of the problems of the neighbourhood, and hence the desired approach.

### Box 9: The importance of the local context in neighbourhood regeneration

In the city of Utrecht the economy has been booming for the last two decades, and 30,000 new houses are to be built on the edge of the city between 2000 and 2015. In some new neighbourhoods 30 per cent of the new houses have been built in the social rented sector, and many low income families from the early post-war neighbourhoods of Hoograven, Kanaleneiland and Overvecht moved there. However, they have 'brought their problems' with them, and new difficult areas have arisen. The households left behind in the early post-war neighbourhoods were the even more deprived ones, mixed with new immigrants and starters on the housing market. In this case, the new neighbourhoods caused relative and absolute deprivation in the post-war housing estates.

## Conclusions

In this essay I aimed to reflect on the question on the correct policy approach to tackle the problems of early post-war neighbourhoods. I argued that a thorough analysis of the problem is needed before any action is taken.

The most expensive and consequential measure is demolition and refurbishment of part of the housing stock. However, these are only needed if the physical quality of the estate is poor, or if the neighbourhood has a very poor position on the housing market and / or a bad reputation. In other cases social programs, combined with better management, are more efficient and effective. Poor education and employability of the population is better targeted with social programs than with demolition, even though the effect may be less visible in the streets. Better management and coordination between the various owners of an estate (social housing providers, local administration, private owners) is a prerequisite for all policies to be successful, and is the backbone of any policy program. A good-quality policy starts with a thorough analysis of the causes of the problems, and good governance of all efforts.

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# On the Governance of Social Housing

***John Flint***

## Introduction

This short paper considers some of the possible futures of social housing and in particular its relationship to governance and urban and neighbourhood change. The paper will focus upon the United Kingdom, but many of the issues are also applicable to other European states. This is a time of intensive discussions about the future of social housing and I have drawn on some of the recent contributions to this debate (Cave, 2007; Hills, 2007; Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2008; Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008; Murie, Pocock and Gulliver, 2007; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007; Bowie, 2008). There are a number of contextual factors which impact on social housing governance, most notably current economic circumstances and the credit crunch, changing house and land prices, the development of new mechanisms for facilitating shared ownership and enhanced design standards, but this paper is limited to discussion of governance issues.

## The Governance of Social Housing

There are a number of emerging trends in the governance of social housing. In England, the Housing Corporation, which regulates the registered social housing sector has been reconfigured as two agencies: the Tenant Service Authority (the new regulatory body) and the Homes and Communities Agency (the development body). This symbolises the continuing dual role for social housing: a 'core' function of managing the housing stock and providing services to tenants and a wider neighbourhood renewal function in which social housing agencies are a central mechanism for the physical, social and economic regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods and facilitating community development and sustainability.

There is also a duality in the welfare and commercial drivers of social housing, which are strongly linked to the balance between public sector funding and private finance underpinning the social housing sector. A general trend is for tightening public sector grants, which increases the reliance on market funding. This has economic consequences, not least in the management of debt levels in the current financial crisis, but also in putting further pressure on the viability of housing associations, which in turn challenges the prioritisation given to welfare aims such as providing services to home-

less individuals and vulnerable households. The financial assets of social housing agencies varies considerably, so in the Netherlands for example, the relatively large capital reserves of many housing associations leads to further pressure upon them to play a leading role in neighbourhood regeneration and redevelopment.

In many European states there is a continuing emphasis on tenant participation and facilitating the active involvement of residents in housing management processes and wider civic activities. In England, this agenda continues to evolve through mechanisms such as Tenant Compact agreements with local authorities and the national Tenant Voice structures. As social housing agencies become increasingly involved in new policy areas, such as worklessness and community cohesion (see below), this is likely to impact on the nature and focus of tenant participation strategies and the skills and knowledge required by tenant activists. Social landlords continue to be embedded within multi-agency partnerships at local strategic and delivery levels.

However, there are other changes in governance that will impact on social landlords. These include a renewed interest in city-regions as scales of governance. For example, the government in England is attempting to ensure that there are vibrant regional tenant representative organi-

sations. As strengthened regional structures emerge (whether regional development agencies and economic partnerships, or assemblies or local mayors) social landlords are engaging with these new tiers of governance, which are underpinned by uncertain alliances and conglomerations between local authority areas and continuing competition for investment and resources between local areas.

In the United Kingdom we are also witnessing some divergence in social housing governance mechanisms as devolution results in varying degrees of autonomy and difference between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Examples of this include the different approaches to homelessness and anti-social behaviour in Scotland and England and the emphasis in Wales on the role of social landlords in ensuring housing affordability and sustainable communities in rural areas.

## **Social Housing and Neighbourhood Governance**

The belief that mixed communities (of tenure, income, ethnicity etc.) promote sustainability and assist wider governmental aims continues to be a dominant paradigm in many European states, despite the fact that a growing body of research evidence suggests that the assumed benefits

of mixed communities and spatial proximity may not actually materialise. Social landlords are therefore operating in increasingly complex neighbourhoods and are developing important property factoring and neighbourhood management functions, coordinating the neighbourhood governance of owner occupiers and private rented sector residents as well as their own tenants.

The trend in Buy to Let mortgages has also created a large number of new small private landlords with one or two properties and this raises considerable challenges for social landlords in managing local neighbourhoods. Increasingly, social landlords are delivering services at a whole neighbourhood level, rather than limiting their services to their own tenants. Although this provides new opportunities for social landlords, there are continuing issues of capacity, skills and resources. Many social landlords also face the challenges of economic and social forces continuing to result in the residualisation or concentration of deprived populations in the social housing sector (and similar processes are also evident in segments of the private rented sector).

Continuing challenges to long-standing rationales underpinning social housing are reflected in a period of intensive debate and radical proposals which reflect much more fundamental and wide ranging uncertainties about the role of

public welfare in European states. In the United Kingdom, government ministers have suggested that tenancies should be linked to activity in the labour market (and in doing so have essentially proposed a tenure that would primarily cater for those with physical, mental or social frailties rather than those more generally on lower or insecure incomes).

Recently, proposals from the Chartered Institute of Housing (the professional housing body in the United Kingdom) that tenants on higher incomes should leave the social housing sector has generated fierce debate. Although this proposal directly contradicts other social policy objectives (such as building mixed communities and fostering a sense of ownership and sustainability in deprived neighbourhoods), it is symbolic both of attempts to link social housing provision to a rational choice neo-liberal economic model of flexible and mobile labour forces and the continuing distancing of social housing from a tenure that historically catered for a wider social and economic spectrum of the population.

Wider trends in political governance are also impacting upon social landlords. There is a continuing focus on holistic multi-agency neighbourhood management and through Local Area Agreements, attempts at what is termed 'double-devolution', aimed at empowering local



service providers and residents, which is likely to enhance the role of social housing providers. There are also changes to the funding and political arrangements between national and local government. In England and Scotland, grants to local authorities are less 'ring-fenced', providing local authorities with more autonomy and discretion in how they prioritise and spend their budgets. Inevitably this will place more pressure on some welfare services, such as homelessness and anti-social behaviour and this is likely to result in social housing agencies being relied upon to play an even bigger role in providing support services to the most deprived and vulnerable households.

Many Western European states are continuing to reconfigure the relationship between individuals and the state, based upon an emphasis on the responsibilities of citizens as well as their rights and wider attempts to make individuals more active and reflexive within a dominant view that these attributes are increasingly required as a response to neo-liberal labour markets. In the United Kingdom for example, there are attempts to make Housing Benefits payments to tenants rather than directly to social landlords. This symbolises the dual aims of facilitating competition and market forces within public sector housing (on the premise that tenants will be offered a degree of choice between providers) and encouraging fiscal and social responsibility and

autonomy amongst citizens. The growing use of choice-based lettings systems, based on the influential Delft model in the Netherlands also epitomises the replication of market processes and increasing choice for tenants, as well as seeking to tackle the long-standing stigmatisation of social housing.

Indeed, some commentators in the United Kingdom have called for an end to the term 'social housing' as having 'outmoded' connotations with bureaucratic state provision. It will be interesting to see to what extent the global economic crisis and the current reaction against under-regulated markets (including of course mortgage markets) challenges some of the fundamental assumptions about the strengths of private, as opposed to public, mechanisms of governance and housing provision. The large levels of personal debt and rising house repossession have also called into question the promotion of marginal owner occupation and a renewed interest in social housing models as a means of ensuring viable and sustainable housing for lower income households. More immediately, personal debt and the economic crisis are likely to generate a larger role for social landlords in providing personal financial management support services within their wider rent arrears practices.



## Social Housing and New Political Priorities

One feature of the recent history of social housing is that the tenure is often used as a vehicle for the delivery of emerging policy priorities for national governments. So for example, growing problems of housing affordability in major cities, regional policy objectives and the need to ensure that 'key workers' are able to reside in these cities and continue to provide core services, highlight the importance of social housing in wider city planning objectives and as being more than a tenure for the most marginal populations. In the United Kingdom, this link between social housing and new political imperatives was evident in the rise of the anti-social behaviour and Respect agendas within which social housing had a central role as governmental attempts were made to embed and prioritise addressing anti-social behaviour across many agencies and policy sectors.

Reflecting the personal priorities of the respective Prime Ministers, the attention given by Tony Blair to tackling anti-social behaviour has been replaced by Gordon Brown's focus on tackling worklessness. There is an on-going programme of government sponsored research into possible connections between the social housing tenure and worklessness and there are increasing

attempts at national and local levels to embed social housing providers within wider strategies aimed at tackling economic inactivity. Social housing agencies, and housing officers, are increasingly being attributed responsibilities for reducing levels of worklessness, including ambitious attempts to address generational disadvantage and cultural orientations to the labour market.

There are also attempts to utilise social housing tenancies and Housing Benefit payments as incentives and sanctions to encourage people to work. This has included a suggestion by the Housing Minister that tenants not actively seeking work could lose their social tenancy. This is part of a wider trend in governance to make increasing linkages across policy areas (employment and housing in this case) and to expand the use of conditionality in welfare provision, so that access to social housing is increasingly dependent on individuals' conduct in other welfare areas. Further examples of this conditionality in the United Kingdom include Housing Benefit sanctions for individuals involved in anti-social behaviour and the growing use of probationary and demoted tenancies.

Social housing is also affected by new directions in related public policy areas. For example, anti-social behaviour policy in the United Kingdom has recently moved away from a

focus on enforcement and legal measures such as eviction and anti-social behaviour orders to early and intensive interventions with vulnerable households aimed at addressing the underlying causal factors, such as alcohol or drug addiction, poor mental health or parenting problems. The expansion in Family Intervention Projects, which provide intensive support to the most problematic households epitomise this approach. Similar approaches are being developed to address the needs of the long-term unemployed and poor educational attendance and attainment. Social housing agencies are playing a key role in these developments. This reflects some of the themes identified above- the continuing centrality of social housing to welfare policy objectives; holistic and intensive support to targeted households and new connections being made across social policy areas including housing, education, employment and crime. These trends require social housing agencies to build new partnerships and work with agencies and organisation they may previously have been more distant from. This also has very important consequences for the social housing profession, demanding new roles and skills and creating new opportunities for specialism and diversification amongst housing practitioners; for example the rise in dedicated anti-social officers within many social landlord organisations. It will be interesting to see wheth-

er these new forms of specialism and enhanced partnerships across agencies result in any changes to the relative status of social housing practitioners compared to other professionals.

## **Social Housing, Cohesion and Citizenship**

As mentioned above, social housing has been prominent in debates around socio-spatial segregation based on income and class and the growing polarisation between rich and poor in many European nations. The rationales of social housing policy are, to varying degrees between states, influenced by the 'underclass' school which identifies changing structures in the working class and problematises a perceived distance between certain populations (the unemployed, lone parents, criminals) and the 'mainstream' values of wider society. This emphasises social and cultural dynamics rather than economic factors in social exclusion, which is manifested in the symbolic equating of social housing estates as geographically and civically disconnected from the wider cities or towns within which they are situated. These debates have their mirror image in the apparent secession of affluent populations into gated communities. In both cases, a socio-spatial withdrawal is envisaged as undermining the cohesion and bonds between citizens

and between citizens and the state at national and local levels.

This paradigm of neighbourhoods and their populations being 'in' but not 'of' their localities has also informed wider concerns about ethno-religious tensions in European states. In England, housing and schooling processes were implicated in the alleged 'parallel' lives of different ethnic and religious groups. The segregation of neighbourhoods along ethnic lines and the resulting lack of social interaction was identified as a primary causal factor in the urban disturbances in Northern English towns in 2001 which led to the community cohesion agenda: an attempt to reinforce 'British' values and challenge multiculturalism. A series of events since then, including 9/11, inter-ethnic disturbances in Birmingham in 2005, the London bombings of 2005 and failed bomb attempts in London and Glasgow have focused governmental and media attention on a conflation of fears of immigration, refugees and asylum seekers and the radicalisation of segments of the Muslim populations and similar governmental trends are evident in many Western European states.

Although social housing was implicated in the reports underpinning the community cohesion agenda in the United Kingdom, it was not given a prominent role in subsequent policy initia-

tives. However, it is apparent that many social landlords in several European states are centrally involved in the management and governance of increasingly diverse populations. This includes utilising allocation policies and mediation to reduce tensions or foster social interaction and cohesion at neighbourhood levels. It has also included reconfiguring housing services to become more attuned to the cultural and religious requirements of new populations and to provide a range of support services, for example to refugees and asylum seekers. Although this has mainly been an issue for social landlords in urban settlements, the European Union expansion programme has resulted in large migrant populations from Eastern European states settling (often temporarily) in more rural areas. This has created particular challenges for those social landlords at both strategic and delivery levels who have not, until recently, had to address significant ethnic and cultural diversity. Indeed, many social landlords and local authorities are attempting to map and identify the housing needs of new populations and make projections for future provision, which once again requires new skill sets to be learned rapidly by housing professionals.

These developments are linked to more fundamental concerns about the ability of European states and their welfare and social policy instruments to cope with radical and rapid economic

and social change. In a number of Western European countries, debates about the basis of citizenship have resulted. In the United Kingdom, government ministers have suggested that access to social housing should be prioritised on the basis of length of residency and national insurance contributions rather than priority need. This fundamental shift in the principles of social housing is in part a response to access to state-subsidised housing becoming a flashpoint where popular and media discourses suggest that new arrivals to the United Kingdom are 'unfairly' benefitting from the welfare state at the expense of 'indigenous' populations.

Although important research into social housing allocations has proved that these allegations are false, they are a central issue in the rise of Far Right parties in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. These events reinforce one of the themes in this paper: that developments in social housing governance are inextricably linked to wider concerns about citizenship and welfare provision in Europe. What is also evident is that in a number of Western European states, notably the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, citizenship is increasingly conceptualised as having cultural, as well as legal or political, dimensions. That is, how individuals behave and their cultural and religious beliefs are linked to wider notions of their allegiance, or otherwise, to the nation state.

It is likely that social housing governance will have an important role in both managing the consequences of immigration and diversity at local levels, and continue to be a prominent arena of debate about the connections between citizenship and welfare entitlement.

## Conclusions

This short paper has attempted to provide a very personal reflection on some key issues and developments in social housing governance in Europe. It has also attempted (perhaps foolishly) to predict some of the likely challenges social housing will face in the near future. One danger in such an exercise is to generalise within and across European nations. Very different conditions and social housing models exist across the continent and I am conscious that this account has primarily been based on the experience of the United Kingdom (and there is considerable variation within the UK itself). One of the most important imperatives for the social housing community across Europe is to increase our knowledge of other countries and to instigate a more robust programme of comparative research. The European Social Housing Observatory plays a very important role here.

Despite these caveats, a number of general conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, social housing

governance is having to respond to radical and rapid economic, social and demographic changes. Many of the difficulties and challenges, as well as opportunities, arising from these changes play out at a micro level in the neighbourhoods where social housing agencies operate. Secondly, social housing is an increasingly important vehicle for delivering urban renewal and regeneration objectives and this demands new partnerships, models of working and different skills within the social housing profession. Thirdly, social housing governance continues to be affected by wider changing political governance structures and these structures are continually evolving and reforming. Social housing is also susceptible to rapidly changing political priorities, such as crime, worklessness and immigration which generate new imperatives for social landlords to take on new roles or shift their focus. Finally, social housing provision and governance is, as it always has been, connected to wider conceptualisations of welfare provision, citizenship and the cohesion of the nation state.

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# From “bricks-and-mortar” investors to community anchors: Social housing governance and the role of Dutch housing associations in urban regeneration

***Gerard van Bortel***

## Introduction

In this essay I discuss the role of Dutch housing associations in urban regeneration in the Netherlands, with an emphasis on the consequences that current changes in governance of the social housing sector might have on this activity. I start by placing developments in perspective, briefly discussing past developments in urban regeneration and the changing role of housing associations. After a critical reflection on the impact of urban regeneration to the creation of sustainable urban areas I explore the link between regeneration and the way Dutch housing associations are financed and governed. In addition, I briefly refer to the possible impacts of the current credit crunch in this field.

## Urban regeneration: a short step back in time

Social landlords in the Netherlands have been involved in urban regeneration for decades. However, the governance framework in which they operate has changed significantly. In the 1970s and 1980s housing associations were mainly involved in the improvement of pre – WW II housing. These properties often lacked a decent housing standard and were not equipped with up-to-date housing amenities like baths, central heating, insulated glass etc. Sometimes the existing dwellings could be improved but often demolition and redevelopment was seen as the only viable solution. In those days housing associations were strictly regulated and the regeneration activities were heavily subsidized and strictly steered and controlled by the state and local authorities. Housing associations didn’t have the autonomy they have today, but were primarily the executors of government policy. Urban regeneration in this era was mainly a bricks-and-mortar operation with often a strong emphasis on giving residents the opportunity to return to their neighbourhood (using the slogan “building for the neighbourhood”).

In the 1990s several developments coincided that strongly changed the characteristics of urban regeneration in the Netherlands. Firstly, the



focus shifted from the pre – WW II housing stock to properties built between 1950 and 1975. The challenge was not primarily the substandard housing quality, but the marginal position on the housing market. Although popular at the time, middle-class households gradually moved out of these areas with predominantly four and five storey apartment blocks and high-rise flats. The demand for these types of dwellings dwindled rapidly, causing high turnover rates, vacancies and anti-social behaviour. In many cases immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, the Dutch Antilles and Surinam moved into these areas, attracted by low rents and short waiting lists.

Secondly, the regulation of social housing in the Netherlands changed dramatically in the mid 1990s, giving housing associations more financial and operational autonomy. In a huge grossing-and-balancing-operation the net present value of all outstanding government subsidies, minus outstanding government loans, were transferred to the housing associations.

The government abolished grants for new affordable housing and housing associations were expected to create a revolving fund whereby rent income and revenues from housing sales would be sufficient to build new affordable homes.

This new arrangement was very loosely regulated. The central government mainly focused

on supervising the financial viability of housing association and only intervened in cases of gross mismanagement and fraud. Supervision on performance was almost non-existent. The regulation to guide the activities of housing associations (the Social Housing Management Act) was intentionally not very specific on the results expected from social landlords. This was based on the vision that performance would be fleshed-out at a local level by local performance agreements between housing associations and local authorities. Market discipline and competition between local social landlords were seen as the main performance incentives.

The third development changing the landscape of urban regeneration was the brutal awakening of Dutch society from a bubble of benign multiculturalism at the end of the 1990s. Public debate was triggered –in part- by an essay written in 2000 on the ‘multicultural drama’ by publicist Paul Scheffer (Scheffer, 2000). A growing conservative populist movement further fuelled discussion on the lack of integration of many immigrant groups. The populist and flamboyant conservative Pim Fortuijn played an important role in this debate. Tragically, a left-wing political activist assassinated him in 2002. Two years later movie-director Theo van Gogh, who also contested the behaviour of some ethnic minority groups, was killed by an Islamic extremist. These

dramatic events had an immense impact on Dutch society. Thinking about a multicultural society became in a way sadder and wiser, emphasising the responsibility of immigrants to integrate, as well as making clear that the regeneration of neighbourhoods with a high concentration of immigration should include more than 'bricks-and-mortar' intervention.

These three developments influenced the debate about the real challenges facing urban regeneration and the tasks of housing associations. This discussion was fuelled by the influential report "Trust in the Neighbourhood" published in 2005 by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). The WRR concluded that people in deprived neighbourhoods are living increasingly disconnected from each other and from democratic institutions. This leads to feelings of anonymity, alienation and insecurity and can result in increased levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. The WRR proposed the creation of more small-scale, neighbourhood-based networks connecting residents, local politicians, local authority officers and third sector organisations like social landlords. The WRR contends many housing associations are still insufficiently committed to the social interventions necessary to turn around deprived neighbourhoods. In their opinion social landlords should take the lead in this with other public services providers,

such as subcontractors. Many social landlords embrace this neighbourhood-focused way of urban regeneration and position themselves as community investors.

In 2007 the then Housing Minister Vogelaar presented a plan to turn around 40 deprived neighbourhoods. This initiative included housing issues but focused especially on social and economic interventions like employment, education and youth (parenting), social integration and security. Housing associations were seen as crucial actors to implement these plans. Although not clear at the start of the Housing Minister's initiative, housing associations were expected to fund a large part of the initiatives.

Many housing associations active in deprived neighbourhoods embraced the plans for more social investments with gusto because exclusive investments in bricks-and-mortar projects had often proved ineffective in solving neighbourhood problems. Not all housing associations are happy with this move towards social investments, many see themselves as a predominantly housing-based business and regard the initiative of the Housing Minister as a bridge too far - especially after it became clear that the housing ministry did not have the money to fund the investments, and expected housing associations to bear the brunt of the investments.

To place things in perspective: only 10 per cent of the 2.4 million properties owned by Dutch social landlords is located in the 40 designated priority neighbourhoods. Many housing associations are investing in the areas with the remaining 90 per cent of the housing stock. Some say that a concentrated high-intensity intervention in a limited number of deprived neighbourhoods is a good thing, but warn against a tunnel vision ignoring problems in less deprived areas (van Bergeijk et al. 2008).

## Impact of “bricks and mortar” urban regeneration

Over the years an increasing number of housing associations in the Netherlands are stepping up their social investments. They support initiatives to increase social inclusion and create education and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups; they invest in extended schools, community hubs and low-cost accommodation for business start-ups. In short, they have evolved from traditional landlords to a ‘housing-based community business’. Neighbourhood regeneration is often at the core of these ‘social entrepreneurs’.

Balancing ‘bricks and mortar’ investments with social interventions is a relatively new development. The regeneration of neighbourhoods has been going on for decades, but it is still unclear if

these investments have resulted in more sustainable urban areas. In the Netherlands this question is subject to fierce and sometimes venomous public debate. One position in this debate, supporting the current practice, is mainly taken by practitioners. They contend that urban renewal is a complicated process and that in many areas, actors (e.g. housing associations, residents and local authorities) have been able to reach agreement on regeneration plans, that a lot of money has been invested in regenerating neighbourhoods, refurbishing houses and creating a more diversified housing stock and types of tenures.

There is a small dissident group, mainly consisting of academics, that do not doubt the efforts (inputs) and outputs of urban regeneration, but have reservations about the outcomes (Van Bergeijk et al., 2008) and the way the success of urban regeneration is assessed (Van Bueren et al., 2007)

To be sustainable urban regeneration should, according to Bergeijk et al. (2008), deliver long-term solutions on a wide range of issues. This does not only include housing, but also the participation and empowerment of residents in urban regeneration, increased trust between the actors involved in this process, better neighbourhood services, more social cohesion between resident groups, increased quality of the public realm and a confidence among residents in the

future of the neighbourhood and the wish to remain living in the area. Based on a case study in six cities (Zwolle, Arnhem, Amersfoort, Den Haag, Rotterdam and Breda). Bergeijk et al. (2008) conclude that urban regeneration is still focused on the improvement of housing quality and still has little impact on the socio-economic position of residents. They especially report the following problems:

1. In many projects the mix of housing and tenure types and the creation of a social mix did not result in stronger social cohesion between different resident groups. Rather than living interconnected lives, people live parallel to each other. Buyers of new built properties in regeneration areas for example have very little contact with people living in the surrounding low-rent dwellings. This implies that many urban regeneration projects did not succeed in creating the small neighbourhood networks that according to the WRR "Trust in the neighbourhood" report is the most vital requirement to turn around deprived neighbourhoods in a sustainable way.
2. Many local authorities and housing associations have decentralised their organisations and created offices and/or officers working at a neighbourhood level. Mandates have however, then not been devolved to a neighbour-

hood level and within these organisations top-down hierarchies are maintained. This creates a form of "frontline abandonment". More officers are in direct contact with residents, but they can do little to solve the problems they encounter.

3. The 'bricks and mortar' approach to urban regeneration is increasingly supplemented with social investments. But both types of interventions are rarely interconnected and remain two separate worlds, thereby missing out on potential synergy effects.
4. Residents are often not genuinely involved in decision-making. Consultation often does not take place in an early phase of the development process. Belated participation of residents gives them no real influence on the plans. Local knowledge is not used in full. Residents often distrust the professionals because they frequently do not serve the neighbourhood agenda. On the other side of the divide, many professionals express the opinion that residents only have a short-term vision on their neighbourhood, are prone to Nimbysm ('Not in my backyard' attitude) and lack the professionalism to participate in complex urban regeneration decision-making.
5. Many forms of deprivation (like unemployment, drug addictions, school drop-outs) are

not specifically linked to the neighbourhood but to individuals. Research shows that urban regeneration often does not solve these problems but only ends the concentration of people facing deprivation by dispersing them over a wider area. Regeneration often results in a “waterbed” forcing the most vulnerable households to cheap houses in neighbourhoods that are not regenerated sometimes, leading to increased concentration of households with anti-social behaviour in the unimproved parts of the housing stock.

Although some reports are quite critical about the impact of urban regeneration efforts, other sources claim that interventions do have their impacts. A recently published report (SCP, 2009), for example, concluded that ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands have improved their housing conditions considerably in past years. This, at least, holds true for the traditional ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands, like people from Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. In general, these groups still rent from housing associations but are able to find their way to welfare services -like housing allowances- as proficiently as the original Dutch population. Especially ethnic minority tenants of housing associations appear to be well-informed.

Their position of many social groups on the housing market has improved due to urban regeneration and refurbishment projects. They have been given the opportunity -although sometimes coerced- to move to better (but often also more expensive) housing. It is worth noting, however, that the effect of a higher rent is often dampened by a higher housing allowance. In addition, home-ownership is increasing among ethnic minority groups due to a rapidly expanding middle class. However, this emancipation of BME-groups has not lead to less segregation. There is still a concentration of ethnic minority groups in the larger cities in the Western part of the country, especially in Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam. The SCP report concludes that both ethnic minority groups and the autochthon populations prefer to live “among themselves”.

Ethnic minority groups report no institutional discrimination in the housing market. The often used choice-letting systems to secure an equal access to social rental homes (33 per cent of the housing stock) and the transparency of these systems is valued. Social housing is still the dominant tenure for ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, these groups do report some discrimination on the private rental market (10 per cent of the housing stock) and have difficulties to get in contact with autochthon neighbours. The limited influence housing

association officials have on the allocation of housing seems to have decreased discrimination. In the 1980s and 1990s some housing associations used dispersion strategies in response to the perceived pressure of the autochthon population to avoid concentrating BME groups by, for example, allowing only one Turkish family in a housing block. This practice has changed immensely, partly because ethnic minority households now form a considerable part of the customer-base of many housing associations, thereby making dispersion strategies not a viable option.

## Social housing governance

When looking back at developments in the Netherlands over the past 15 years we can see many initiatives to close the governance gap created after the grossing and balancing operation in the 1990s. What makes the discussion complicated is that this financial independence from the government has proved very beneficial for Dutch housing associations because of interest levels (and interest payments) in the second half of the 1990s were lower than expected. In addition, many housing associations boosted their financial position even more by the revenues from the sale of rental homes. In combination with the rising tensions in many urban areas the financial wealth of the social housing sector triggered discussions on how to mobilize the equity of social landlords.

New governance mechanisms were developed in response to these discussions, often self-regulatory instruments developed by social landlords. The central government does not see itself as a micro-managing regulator for the social housing sector, but wants to operate more as a systems manager making sure that the necessary instruments (like performance audits and internal supervisory boards) are in place to safeguard the good performance and good governance.

Recently the Meijerink Steering Group (named after its chair), gathering representatives from the Ministry of Housing and the social housing umbrella organization Aedes, has drafted a proposed new governance structure for the social housing sector. This draft emphasises the importance of a professional internal supervisory board. In the Netherlands, housing associations in general have two boards, one executive board with one or more executive officers and a supervisory board with five to seven non-executive board members, two members have to be elected based on a nomination by tenant organisations.

Important elements of social housing governance are self-regulatory performance assessments. The drafted proposal -still to be approved by Parliament- contains the creation of a new regulatory authority. The proposal also contains

a description of the activities housing associations are allowed to deploy. These are divided into three areas (see Table 1)

Table 1, **Fields of housing associations’ activity (as proposed by the Meijerink Steering Group)**

Core activity	Secondary activities	Additional activities
<p>Develop and manage affordable homes for sale or rent.</p> <p>If necessary in local context build for other groups, like rental and owner-occupier dwellings in higher price segments.</p> <p>Housing associations have to be accountable for their performance in this field of activities.</p>	<p>Invest in the public realm.</p> <p>Invest in other forms of real-estate (like schools, care facilities, neighbourhood hubs).</p> <p>Housing associations have to explain why they invest in this area, but also if they do not invest.</p>	<p>Invest in communities and people, not related to real-estate.</p> <p>Invest in the social and economic development of neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Housing associations have to explain and defend why they invest in this area.</p>

The activity fields described above would make Dutch housing associations more of a real-estate company with a social purpose. Based on the proposal of the Meijerink Steering Group, the necessity to expand activities into higher priced segments of the housing markets need a lower level of proof than investing in communities and people.

### Financial autonomy of housing associations in the Netherlands

To understand the role of Dutch housing associations in urban renewal, one needs to understand the background of their financial situation. Dutch housing associations have around €32 billion in equity. However, they are mainly rich in housing assets, not in cash.



Due to their large financial reserves (at least on paper), Dutch social landlords could access the capital market on very favourable conditions. Due to the financial backup by the Social Housing Guarantee Fund, housing associations have a triple-A rating. Although still (very) solvent, housing associations are hit by the current credit crisis in several ways. Notwithstanding their positive credit ratings, banks appear not to be willing to lend to housing associations. Like many other companies housing associations face liquidity problems. These problems do not endanger their daily landlord activities, but make it difficult to invest in new housing and funding regeneration activities. The other important source of income, the revenues of housing sales, is also dwindling rapidly because consumers are reluctant to buy in these circumstances. While these problems do not endanger their daily landlord activities, they do make it difficult to invest in new housing and regeneration activities.

However, the difference between 'asset rich' and 'cash rich' has proved too subtle for the Dutch government. Attracted by the high levels of equity in the social housing sector, the Dutch government introduced two new forms of taxation in 2008. The Finance Ministry introduced the obligation for housing associations to pay corporate taxes on all their activities; this expanded an also recently introduced taxation that only targeted

their commercial activities. The latter was introduced under pressure of the EU-commission that regarded the state support given by the Dutch government to non-profit landlords as excessive and damaging for competition. In addition, the Housing minister introduced a fiercely contested capital levy, called the "Vogelaar" levy, named after the then housing minister. This taxation is meant as a form of forced solidarity to financially support the social landlords with housing stock in the 40 priority neighbourhoods by those working outside these areas.

Dutch housing associations claim that the combination of increased taxation, the difficulties getting loans from banks and dwindling revenues from housing sales is crimping their ability to invest in urban regeneration and green field housing development.

## **The credit crisis and the Dutch housing market**

The impact of the housing crisis in the Netherlands is still unclear. In the Netherlands there are still no steep drops in house prices, nor an alarming rise in housing repossession. There is however a small decline in house prices. The Dutch Association of Real Estate agents (NVM) reported drops in house prices of 1.8 per cent over 2008. This is the first drop in house prices

for many years. The housing market is clearly slowing down. In the last quarter of 2008, only one in six houses for sale was sold, in the third quarter of 2008 one in four was sold. There is anxious anticipation what will happen to the house prices in 2009. The NVM expects a further decline in 2009 of 5 per cent. There is discussion if this is only a foreboding overture of more dramatic drops in house prices, or just a reflection of housing consumers temporarily turning away from the housing market. The latter could very well be the case because recent research shows that consumer trust in the economy and housing market is dwindling, as is the number of house sale transactions. It takes longer for a home to be sold, especially in the higher price segments of the market. A recent development is that sellers appear to lower the asking prices of their properties.

The million dollar question is, of course, if the current house prices reflect the real value or if prices are inflated by a bubble. In April 2008, the IMF published a report, fiercely contested by (amongst others) the Dutch government, claiming that house prices in the Netherlands were inflated 30 per cent above their real market value (IMF, 2008). There are differences in opinion as to whether a slowing-down housing market is good or bad news. Housing demand in most regions in the Netherlands still exceeds supply.

Due to high housing prices, even middle class households find it increasingly difficult to afford a home of their own. The decline in house prices combined with lower mortgage rates could make it easier for first-time buyers to become home-owners. Some opinion leaders hope that the credit crisis will create an incentive to reform the housing market in the Netherlands and align the many mutually counteracting housing policy instruments. Income tax regulation, for example, allows almost unlimited mortgage rent deduction leading to inflated house prices. On the other hand, rents are strictly regulated leading to rents that are often considerably below market value. So, two opposing forces create a gap between price levels in the rental and owner-occupier market segments, leading to stagnation in mobility. This creates a gap between the rental and owner-occupier market, the first being too cheap and scarce, the latter too expensive and also in short supply.

## **Impact of the credit crisis on urban regeneration**

Regardless of the possible impact of the credit crisis on the housing market, it does seem that developments are to have a big impact on the progress of urban regeneration projects. Half of the housing associations report that they have put housing development projects on hold and

the number of 'iced' projects is expected to increase. Several publications reported a steep decline in the sales on new housing. The building of new homes has a large impact on urban development. In 2005-2006 43 per cent of new homes were built in existing neighbourhoods (source: CBS<sup>13</sup>). The impact of housing associations on the housing production is considerable. In 2007 they delivered around 34,000 new homes for sale or rent, is around 42 per cent of the total production of new built homes in the country.

Urban regeneration in the Netherlands often includes the replacement of small and cheap rental homes with housing in higher price segments. Housing associations frequently develop these homes in collaboration with commercial developers. In the current difficult market circumstances many developers do not want to start with building activities until 70 per cent is sold. Housing associations cannot finance these homes, because the Social Housing Guarantee Fund (WSW) does not guarantee the loans needed to do this if the price of the properties exceeds €200,000 (which is generally the case). In January 2009, the Dutch government announced that it will raise the WSW maximum, but was not specific to what level.

In theory housing associations could anti-cyclically invest in new housing and thereby support economic growth in these dire times, but although their core values may still be firmly non-profit, acquiring the financial means to invest is dominated by market logic. Like for-profit organisations housing associations encounter liquidity problems. In addition, many housing associations are reluctant to solve the problems of commercial developers and become active in more expensive and more risk-exposed segments of the housing market that are alien to their core activities.

Generally developers only start building if 70 per cent of the properties is sold. Housing associations often use the same criterion, but some - depending on their level of risk aversion - will start earlier. In part because they still have the option to convert the tenure from homeownership to rental if necessary. Because many projects of housing associations are developed in close partnership with commercial developers risk aversion is higher and the inclination of housing associations to build anti-cyclical to economic developments seems to diminish.

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<sup>13</sup> Based on data from CBS (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics).

## Challenges for the future

As we have discussed in this paper the character of urban regeneration in the Netherlands has changed over the years. A bricks-and-mortar approach was replaced by more balanced methods focusing on communities and the people living in deprived neighbourhoods. However there is still little evidence that the investments and the efforts of the parties involved in regeneration do really contribute to sustainable urban areas. Evidence from recent research show there is still a lot to be improved. There are some daunting challenges for the future:

- Integrating social and physical investments and creating synergy from both types of interventions;
- Involving residents from the start in the development of urban interventions and using their local knowledge to build neighbourhood based networks;
- Tackling frontline abandonment by giving local authority officers and housing association staff the means and mandates to get things done;
- Increasing the focus on the outcomes for residents and wider society rather than inputs (money, time, effort) and outputs.

There are some severe threats that could endanger the progress of regeneration and could make the challenges even more daunting. The proposals for the new social housing governance structure in the Netherlands could limit the possibilities of housing associations to engage in non-housing investments and could become a straightjacket for social landlords who want to become investors in communities and people and not only a real-estate business.

The impact of the crisis on the Dutch housing market is still unclear. If commercial developers and housing associations keep on putting development projects on hold, as they seem to do now, this could lead to increased housing market shortages in the years to come. Because many new dwellings are built in existing neighbourhoods this could jeopardise the progress of urban regeneration.

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## CONCLUSIONS

### Sustainable urban regeneration in Europe: Rethinking the place of social housing in integrated policies

***Darinka Czischke***

How to tackle urban regeneration of deprived urban areas in a sustainable way? How to make social housing part of the solution in these cases? What are the key elements of integrated urban policies to make this happen? In this volume, we have presented four different perspectives on these questions. Although representing primarily two countries (the UK and the Netherlands), the authors draw on their European research experience to raise more general issues that are applicable to other contexts. Ultimately, these essays are meant to create a discussion. Falk and Dekker have looked at evidence from case studies of deprived areas that have been turned around thanks to the right policies. Furthermore, Dekker analysis also looks at problematic aspects and possible pitfalls of different policy options. Flint and van Bortel have explored more general aspects linked to the changes in governance structures in their respective countries and reflected on how these changes may impact on

the ability of social housing providers to respond to current challenges in urban regeneration.

Linked to the latter discussion is the underlying trend in both countries featured in this volume towards central governments thinking of social housing as a key vehicle for the delivery of welfare policies at local level. Paradoxically, after decades of progressive state withdrawal from direct financial support to (social) housing, governments in the UK and the Netherlands (and possibly to follow in other European countries), are now debating and even transforming the regulatory architecture of social housing in their respective countries in order to 'get more out' of social housing providers. For example, as Flint points out, social landlords are increasingly delivering services at a whole neighbourhood level, rather than restricting their services to their own tenants. Furthermore, changes in funding such as greater autonomy and discretion in grants to local authorities are likely to put more pressure on some welfare services such as homelessness and anti-social behaviour, which is likely to result in social housing actors being relied upon to play an even bigger role in providing support services to the most deprived and vulnerable households.

Similarly, as van Bortel explains, housing associations in the Netherlands are seen as crucial actors to implement central government plans

to socially and economically regenerate the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (see Vogelaar's '40 neighbourhoods plan'). This follows an earlier call by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) in 2005 for social housing providers to take the lead in social interventions to turn around deprived neighbourhoods. However, as van Bortel points out, while many housing associations are already carrying out extensive community investment projects and see this as part of their mission, there is also the perception that the Ministry expects housing associations to bear the brunt of the investments, even taking into account that only 10 per cent of the 2.4 million properties owned by Dutch social landlords is located in the 40 designated priority neighbourhoods.

Within this broader political and policy trends, it is clear that social housing providers are having in both countries –and to some extent in many other European countries as well- a crucial role to play in urban regeneration. Hence, in this concluding chapter I reflect on some of the key common elements presented in this volume, and try to draw a picture of the main challenges in this field for the social housing sector. However, it is worth noting that these challenges are not only referred to social housing actors, but more broadly to policy-makers, local authorities and a wide array of local stakeholders in these com-

munities, including resident representatives, local entrepreneurs, social innovators, etc. Given that our aim in this volume is to look at the place of social housing in integrated urban policies, co-operation between all these different local actors is required to make sure that social housing achieves its full potential to become 'part of the solution'.

### **Good management: from 'Ugly duck' to 'Cinderella'?**

As Dekker points out, when faced with the problem of neighbourhoods in decline, policy makers (and politicians) tend to think in the first place, of 'visible' and radical interventions such as demolition, refurbishment or even the building of 'flagship' projects (e.g. a public library or community centre of stunning architecture) as the best solution. Alternatively or in addition to these measures, they might also include a set of social programmes to tackle the social problems affecting the areas. However, in many cases, a careful analysis of the causes of the problems of the specific area might show that investing in management improvements can bear much better results and, interestingly enough, cost much less money and time than the former measures. Sadly, short-term considerations such as politicians' desire of 'visible' impacts or the commercial interests of



real estate developers and other related groups tend to disregard the potential of good management systems to turn around deprived areas.

Indeed, good management features across the four articles in this volume as one of the key aspects to improve the situation of deprived areas. To start with, as Dekker points out, the very high cost and lengthy duration of demolition processes trigger incertitude amongst residents, leading to social and physical deterioration and a disturbance of the social fabric, and ends up creating more problems than those it was intended to solve originally. Instead, Dekker posits

that a thorough evaluation of the situation of a troubled neighbourhood prior to making such a radical policy decision can bear better results at a much lower cost.

Improving management is based on better systems, skills and tools. Bringing together ideas presented in this volume, a set of key aspects of good management stand out (see figure 1):

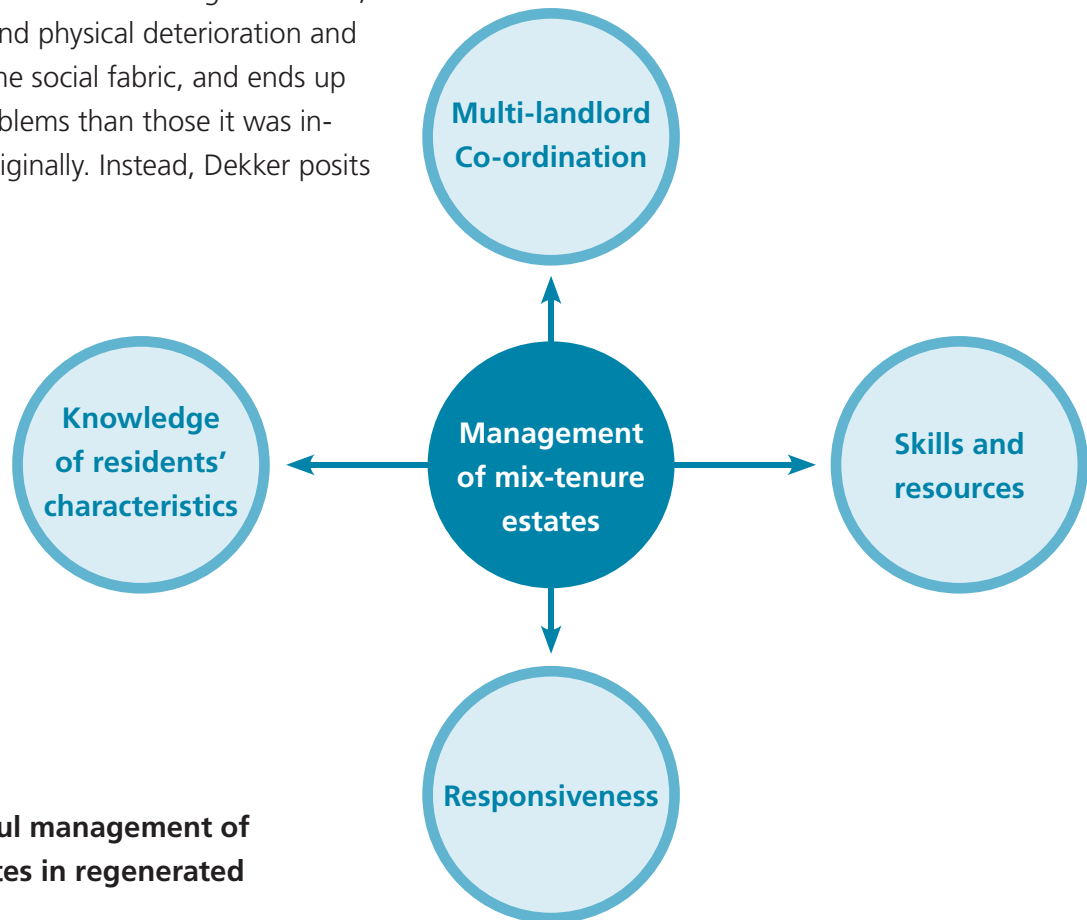


Figure 1

**Keys to successful management of mix-tenure estates in regenerated urban areas:**

### ***– Co-ordinating management of areas with multiple landlords:***

According to Falk, clear legislation on ownership rights and responsibilities (e.g. on public spaces) is an indispensable condition for good management. Furthermore, all authors coincide in that multiple ownership of the housing in an area (i.e. by social housing providers, local administrations, individual owner-occupiers, etc.) requires co-ordination of management efforts, despite the considerable time and effort that it takes. Flint explains how in Britain the recent buy-to-let phenomenon has created a multitude of small landlords in some neighbourhoods, where co-ordination with other private owners as well as with social landlords is very much needed. An example of good practice in this regard can be found in the innovative approach of the ‘Dalgarno Neighbourhood Management Alliance’ in West London (UK), where a multi-landlord estate (managed by 4 different social landlords) is run by a professional neighbourhood manager hired by the group of landlords. The role of this manager is to liaise with all four landlords and to co-ordinate action so as to avoid duplicities and potential conflicts. The experience has so far resulted in a widely- acknowledged success.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.dalgarnotrust.org.uk](http://www.dalgarnotrust.org.uk).

### ***– Ensuring necessary and up-to-date skills and resources:***

This is especially the case of local authorities and social housing practitioners, who have to work together on this front. Good management requires the capacity and skills to work in partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, where negotiation and conflict resolution skills are strongly needed to be able to work together effectively. However, the relative lack of leadership and project management skills amongst local authorities features often as one of the limiting factors when it comes to establishing effective partnerships for managing sustainable communities<sup>15</sup>. Often, it is social housing providers –in so far they have the resources and the expertise that some local authorities lack- who take the lead on organizing community initiatives, sometimes even filling a gap that local governments are leaving in terms of service provision and leadership in the community – a trend we have described above. Strong partnerships call for enhanced skills of local governments to act as effective partners in these initiatives. In this regard, examples to overcome these shortcomings can be found in the URBACT programme,

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<sup>15</sup> See for example, Heino, J, Czischke, D and M Nikolova (2007) Managing Rental Housing in the European Union: Experiences and Innovative Approaches. CECODHAS European Social Housing Observatory and VVO-PLC. Helsinki, and The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (UK).

established by the European Union to foster the formation of networks between local authorities from cities across Europe in order to learn from each other and share skills and resources for better tackling regeneration issues. Interestingly, in addition to the exchange component, this initiative includes funding for technical expertise to support and enable local officials to improve their skills base.<sup>16</sup> Another example, mentioned by Falk, is the establishment of the 'Homes and Communities Academy' by the UK government as a follow-up to the Egan Review's call for improving management skills at local level.

### ***– Better knowledge of residents' characteristics:***

Knowing and understating the local residents' profiles and needs in the specific areas where the problems are located, including the available 'assets' (i.e. the human potential to work with) is a necessary input for improving management systems. For example, Flint points out to the increasing diversification of tenants in social housing, who require specific kinds of support services. Furthermore, Dekker mentions the importance of mapping and understanding current and future demand for the estate, as well as the impact that the relative market position the estate holds in the (regional) housing market

has for residents to decide to stay in or leave the neighbourhood. The latter can lead to concentrations of vulnerable residents in the neighbourhood, with the associated social and physical problems this might bring and that therefore represent tough challenges for the management of these areas. Last but not least, Falk also recommends carrying out surveys and market studies to better understand local demand and thereby develop better management responses.

### ***– Responsive ongoing management:***

The sustainability of well-functioning neighbourhoods, especially in mix-tenure / socially mixed estates, relies on a constant up-dating of the previous four factors, i.e. coordination, skills and resources, and knowledge about the population characteristics. This will determine the capacity of the management system to swiftly and adequately respond to such changes. Examples of this responsiveness can be, as Falk explains, the decision to allocate houses to needy families and flats to higher income when the neighbourhood density increases (the higher costs of high-density living can create a poverty trap for residents with lower incomes who cannot afford these maintenance costs). Similarly, 'allocation agreements' and a policy of 'sensitive lettings' can avoid people with conflicting lifestyles having to live next door to each other.

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.urbact.org](http://www.urbact.org)

## **Creative residents' involvement: Fostering local connections**

Early community engagement of residents in regeneration projects and new schemes features repeatedly as a policy recommendation in this field. However, in practice there are only few examples of resident involvement going beyond mere consultation. Falk uses the term 'creative involvement' to refer to innovative ways of residents' participation, which indeed goes beyond such formal mechanisms. For example, establishing local offices like in the Netherlands, where residents can see the model of the final project, can help them to get direct face-to-face contact with other future residents before coming to live together, as well as with planners and practitioners. In addition, the support of 'micro-initiatives' (e.g. local businesses, non-monetary exchanges of services and goods produced by local residents, grassroots cultural projects, etc.) that empower local residents giving them a direct stake in their area can be another way of strengthening their involvement and creating wider links with the local social and economic actors<sup>17</sup>. Related examples include charters and development frameworks that draw people motivated in the outcomes of the project, and who can become pioneers to set up initial community

facilities. In addition, Falk highlights the value of housing co-operatives (much more active in continental Europe) in terms of fostering residents' involvement and taking responsibility for common areas.

## **Socially mixed communities: Panacea or utopia?**

Another relevant and unavoidable debate when talking about successful urban regeneration of deprived areas is the usefulness of social mix policies. For the past decades, the basic assumption of most urban policy in Europe has been that, in order to fight the formation of ghettos, social mix can help create more cohesive communities. However, while this is clearly an important objective, one should bear in mind that in some cases there are well-established communities or enclaves of specific ethnic or social groups which actually do work well as they are. At the same time, as Flint points out, there is no conclusive evidence on the actual achievement of the desired outcomes of these mixed communities. In addition, van Bortel quotes research carried out in the Netherlands<sup>18</sup>, which found that in many projects the mix of housing and tenure types and the creation of a social mix did not result in stronger social cohesion between differ-

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17 For a examples of 'micro-initiatives', see [www.citymined.org](http://www.citymined.org)

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18 Van Bergeijk, E, Kokx, A, van Kempen, R and G Bolt (2008) *Helpt Herstructureren?* [Does urban renewal work?], Utrecht: University of Utrecht.

ent resident groups, and rather they continued to live parallel to each other – similarly to Flint’s account of the British debate in this regard.

On the other hand, however, evidence shows that excessive concentrations of social housing tenants who are deprived and/or unemployed does not help the process of social integration. Overall, we can conclude that it is necessary to recognize the contested nature of this approach, and to highlight the need to evaluate its application on a case-by-case basis. In this regard, it is necessary to think of social housing provision as embedded in wider urban contexts and infrastructure, with good access to transport links, services, facilities, and crucially, to jobs. Furthermore, when thinking about how to make mixed communities work well, Falk proposes a sort of ‘checklist’ for the feasibility of these schemes, which includes: ensuring that schools act as ‘community hubs’; designing master plans with an ‘appropriate’ or ‘balanced’ tenure mix; devising local letting plans that feed back into the design so as to ensure a sufficient range of size and types of units to allow residents’ mobility in the neighbourhood as their circumstances change; providing good linkages to local jobs and services; using covenants<sup>19</sup> on the land to

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<sup>19</sup> Editor’s note: A covenant, in contrast to a contract, is a one-way agreement whereby the covenantor is the only party bound by the promise. A covenant may have conditions and prerequisites that qualify the undertaking, including the actions of second or third parties, but there is no inherent

ensure standards of behaviour (e.g. and using community land trusts to ensure transferability of covenants over time), amongst others.

In addition, both Falk and Dekker refer to the importance of design issues for successful mixed communities, which is helped by measures such as: avoiding anonymous public spaces, inaccessibility to the estates’, lack of pedestrian pathways and unsafe location of parking areas. Good design also includes the provision of communal facilities surrounded by buildings rather than isolated on the edge and providing enough children facilities for different ages, amongst others. Furthermore, amongst some of the management aspects linked to design are: employment of ‘supercaretakers’; setting up own maintenance organizations; establishment of environmental trusts to look after larger areas of public space while involving different parts of the community in voluntary work, etc.

Last but not least, another aspect stressed by Falk for the success of mixed-communities is the need to invest in ‘bridging social capital’ in new settlements, where usually people have little in common. This has to be incorporated in the financial planning of such schemes. But, as he points out, ‘developing social capital needs to

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agreement by such other parties to fulfil those requirements. Consequently, the only party that can break a covenant is the covenantor.

be seen as an investment that adds value, not as an optional extra. Its value can be monitored through the take-up of housing and customer attitude surveys, as well as through indicators such as turnover, property values, and even demands on local health services’.

## **The economic crisis and sustainable communities**

Although authors warn of not focusing too much on the impact of the current economic crisis on housing and regeneration policies, they do acknowledge the immediate and medium term effects that it might have, in particular on deprived neighbourhoods.

According to Flint, the global economic crisis and the concomitant reaction against under-regulated markets would be challenging some of the core assumptions about the strengths of the private mechanisms of housing provision vis-à-vis public ones. Furthermore, the current crisis has called into question the excessive emphasis many European governments have put on encouraging owner-occupation, in particular for low-income households, as one of the effects of the large levels of personal debt and high number of housing repossession claims. Interestingly, in Flint’s view a renewed interest in social housing models might arise from this situation, includ-

ing a larger role for social landlords in providing personal financial management support services to tenants, as part of their wider rent arrears practices.

In van Bortel’s view, although the impact of the housing crisis in the Netherlands is still unclear, there are reasons to believe that there will be a considerable impact on urban regeneration projects, as private developers are putting projects on hold due to uncertain demand and low liquidity (a situation that has also been reported in the UK). In his view, social housing providers are unlikely to ‘come to the rescue’ by acting counter-cyclically, be it either due to similar liquidity problems as those encountered by private developers (availability of financial means is dominated by a market logic for everyone) or due to ethical reasons (i.e. they remain attached to their non-profit values). Hence, since most regeneration projects involve joint participation of private and social housing actors, risk aversion might dominate and therefore developments might dwindle.

Last but not least, Falk points out to the need to ‘reconsider what building sustainable communities is really about’ against a backdrop of ‘collapse of housing investment and unachievable development objectives’. He argues that often ‘soft issues’ such as service, maintenance and

neighbour relations are left to the last minute as they carry 'less weight' vis-à-vis 'harder' planning and development issues (i.e. bricks and mortar and physical infrastructure). However, as he points out, it is usually in these soft issues where the real tensions associated to living together arise. While the economic downturn can intensify social tensions, building new communities in the right places and in the right way can lead to restart the economy at local level (for example through local / social entrepreneurship, micro-initiatives, etc.).

## **Towards an integrated approach to sustainable urban development**

We now turn to the question underlying the main subject of this publication, namely: What should be an integrated approach to sustainable urban regeneration of deprived areas, and what should be the place of social housing in it? While the term 'integrated approach' is widely used in European and national policy documents, there seems to be no clear consensus on a definition of what an 'integrated approach' really consists of. The in-depth development of such a concept is beyond the scope of this publication. However, it is possible to recognize four key elements of an integrated urban policy on the basis of the ideas discussed so far:

### ***a) Co-ordination between agencies:***

As discussed above, this is particularly relevant in the case of multi-owner/multi-tenure estates.

### ***b) Multi-dimensional approach***

This refers to a combination of social, physical and management aspects, as well as to the right balance between an area- and a people-based approaches.

### ***c) Cutting across and linking up policy fields***

As mentioned earlier, an integrated approach should create synergies between related and mutually-dependent policy fields, such as housing-employment; housing-social inclusion, etc.

### ***d) Context-specific***

The selection of the right policy intervention needs to be based on a thorough analysis of the specific situation of the area in question, as described above.



Figure 2

## Regenerating deprived estates: context-based analysis of the right policy measure

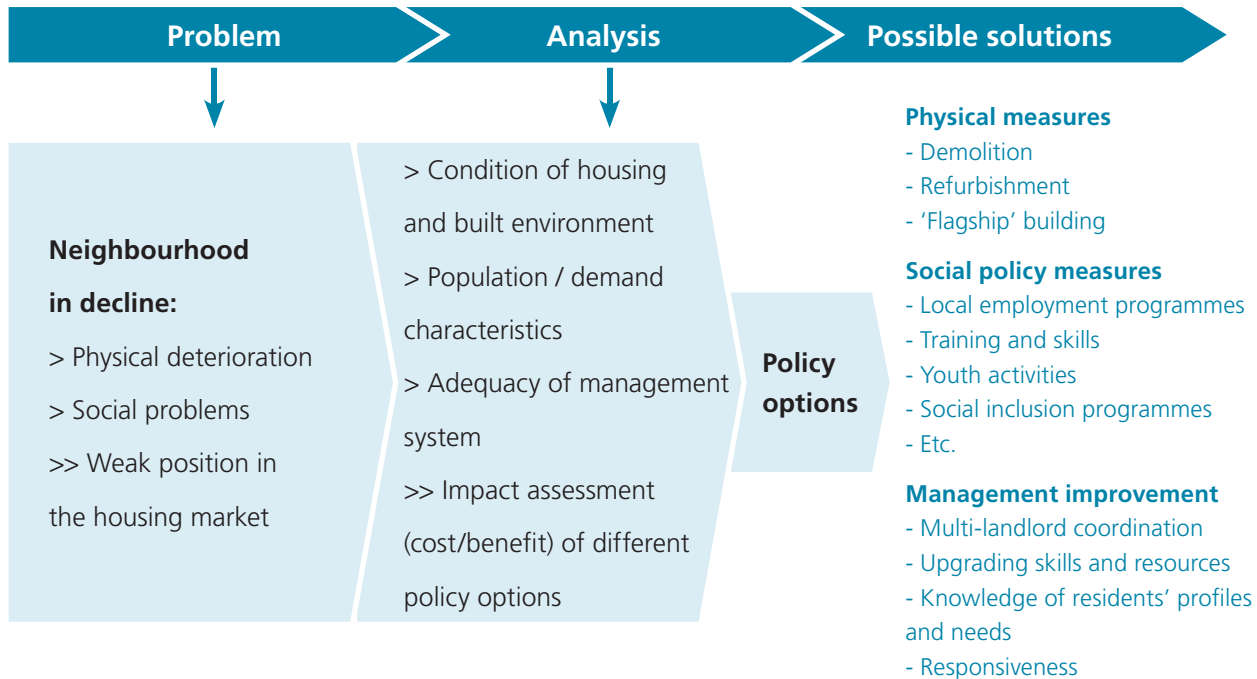


Figure 2 aims to bring together the elements discussed in this chapter so as to reflect on the process of integrated policy-making in urban regeneration. Interestingly, while the first three elements out of the four we have identified as part of an 'integrated approach' feature in most literature in this field, as Dekker points out, the 'context' is often not or poorly acknowledged in area-based programmes. As she explains, the regional housing market influences the relative position and reputation of the housing estate. This situation raises the problem of those who can afford to leave to new, 'better' neighbour-

hoods doing so, and leaving poorest households behind. This calls for combining area-based and people-based policies. This means including an ex-ante assessment of the situation of the specific areas of intervention, and an understanding of the profile and needs of its current and possible future residents before action is taken, specifically in the case of deprived areas where demolition and renewal are being considered as a way of socially and physically regenerate a deprived area. Falk also argues for an ad-hoc, context-based approach, in particular to management: 'management ought to match the situation and

what members of the community actually want'. Furthermore, his suggestion of using tools such as market surveys and housing capacity studies to help identify the type of people who are going to move into a new housing project, also points out to the need to better understand the profile of the residents and consequently, their needs and aspirations, prior to any policy intervention. Without an improved position on the housing market, physical improvements might not bear the desired outcomes. There are some limits to what isolated, sectoral policies might achieve if they are not co-ordinated following a thorough analysis of the specificity of the areas problems, their residents' profiles and needs, etc (e.g. youth projects, unemployment projects, etc.). In sum, once a neighbourhood is identified as 'problematic' (step 1 in figure 2), it is indispensable to carry out a thorough analysis of the situation in the specific area, as well as an assessment of the likely impacts each type of policy intervention (and their combination) might have in that particular area. Only then the right policy intervention should be chosen. And, as we have explained, in most cases this will require a combination of different types of policies. The degree to which one is adopted over the other will depend on the specific context analysis.

Last but not least, I would like to summarise the main challenges raised by our analysis:

- Integrated policies to achieve sustainable communities have to rely on a thorough analysis of the specific areas and their (regional) context, taking into account the physical conditions of the estate and the degree to which it requires radical measures (such as demolition); the population characteristics and the need for social programmes to support vulnerable groups; and (any) management improvements that can help turn the situation around.
- Greater development of management systems, skills and resources can lead to unexpected improvements in the situation of deprived areas, and cost less money and time compared to large-scale physical interventions such as demolition and/or refurbishment.
- A context-based approach is needed to establish the benefits of applying social mix policies into specific areas. While social mix can work in some cases, in some others where well-established communities work well, it might be better to pursue other measures to help solve the problems in that neighbourhood.
- In the face of the current economic crisis, it is essential not to abandon investment in social infrastructure, as the quality of social relations and the benefits of good management can provide the basis for economic recovery and social inclusion in most cases.



## About the authors



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Karien Dekker is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Utrecht University. Her research interests are urban governance, social cohesion, neighbourhood regeneration, policy processes, and civic participation. She has managed the EU funded project Restructuring Large Housing Estates in Europe, and co-edited a book with the same title. She has been involved in international comparative studies on neighbourhood regeneration and policy processes and obtained several grants for her work. Her current research focuses on the process and the effect of neighbourhood development, power relations, policy evaluation and regeneration measures.



### ***Nicholas FALK***

Nicholas Falk is an economist, strategic planner and urbanist. He founded URBED (Urban and Economic Development Group) in 1976 to offer practical solutions to urban regeneration and local economic development. Over the last five years, Nicholas has focused on new communities and the future of the suburbs. He worked on the local management organisation for a new town in Cambridge, and the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth initiative, which has been shortlisted for an RTPI award. He is co-author of Building the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Home and many articles on the future of suburbs and town centre revitalisation. His experience in new communities ranges from promoting a new village near Swansea, devising a development framework and brief for a former mental hospital in Hertsmere, to being appointed as the masterplanner for a new urban extension to Houghton Regis and the Luton Dunstable conurbation.



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### ***Gerard VAN BORTEL***

Gerard van Bortel has more than 20 years experience in the social housing sector as a practitioner, consultant and academic. He is a member of the OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands. He combines academic research with consultancy for clients like housing associations, specialising in organisational and institutional developments and complex decision-making processes. He is involved in issues related to regulation, performance measurement and governance of social housing landlords in countries like the Netherlands, Flanders and England. Before joining OTB, he worked as a strategy consultant at RIGO Research en Advies in Amsterdam and as a policy officer and manager for housing associations in the Netherlands.





### ***Darinka Czischke***

Darinka Czischke is the Research Director of the European Social Housing Observatory at CECODHAS. A sociologist and urban planner (MSc Regional and Urban Planning at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Distinction) since 2004 Darinka has been in charge of re-establishing and developing the Observatory. In this role, she monitors trends in housing policies and carries out policy- and practice-oriented research on strategic themes for the sector, such as: characterisation of the social housing sector in the EU; management models of social housing organisations in Europe; the role of social housing for social cohesion and for the integration of immigrants, etc. Her previous experience includes policy-oriented research in the urban, social and environmental fields for the LSE Cities Programme; the ESRC Research Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE); the Greater London Authority (GLA); the Environmental Planning and Research Centre (CIPMA) in Santiago, Chile; and the Institute of Sociology at the Universidad Católica de Chile, amongst other institutions.

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**URBAN REGENERATION IN EUROPE:  
THE PLACE OF SOCIAL HOUSING  
IN INTEGRATED URBAN POLICIES**  
Current perspectives



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