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**MANAGEMENT OF PRIVATISED
HOUSING:
POLICIES AND PRACTICE IN EAST AND
WEST**

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Management of Privatised Housing: Policies and Practice in East and West

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Sale of public and social housing has been a major aspect of housing policies in the past decades. Privatisation has occurred most radically in within Eastern European countries and China, but has also taken place within some Western European countries and Australia. In all countries, privatisation has lead to new problems for housing management. As a result of the privatisation, many estates are now in a state of mixed (public and private) ownership, which raises questions about the division of responsibilities between public and private owners. Adequate legislation to deal with this situation is lacking. The public managers are sometimes hampered by the (still) bureaucratic mechanisms within their organisations, while the new owners are not used to being responsible for the maintenance of their dwellings. Furthermore, there are limited financial resources for maintenance and renewal among public and private owners. At the same time the need for investments is pressing, particularly within the massive housing estates dating from the communist era. Thus, the management of privatised housing is an important topic of international concern, which could benefit from an international exchange of knowledge. In our paper we present a preliminary summary of a large international cooperative research project that focused on the sale policies pursued by governments and landlords, the management problems in (partly) privatised estates and approaches that have been developed to deal with management in such estates.

Introduction

The later part of the 20th century marks a turning point in both Eastern and Western European housing policies. In Eastern Europe the transition to markets and democracy rapidly introduced market-based housing systems. The main instrument used to achieve this transformation was the massive privatisation of the public housing stock. Many of the public dwellings were sold (or in some cases almost given away) to the tenants, resulting in a rapid increase of homeownership in Eastern Europe (Tsenkova, 2000). This privatisation, however, entails new management problems—technical, social and financial. The socialist housing estates are of relatively poor quality and ageing rapidly. As a result of the privatisation, many estates are now in a state of mixed (public and private) ownership, which poses legal and financial challenges with respect to the division of responsibilities between public and private owners (Lux, 2003). The public managers are sometimes hampered by the bureaucratic mechanisms within their organisations, while the new owners often lack financial resources for maintenance and renewal (Tsenkova, 2005). The social mix has not been successful in many ways.

In Western European countries, housing systems have been reformed due to neo-liberal developments characterised by deregulation, decentralisation and privatisation tendencies. Within the housing sector, this has resulted among other things in the sale of public and social rented dwellings (Uitermark, 2003). Sale to households occurred most radically in England where a large part of the local authorities' housing stock has been sold to the tenants under the 'right to buy' (Jones and Murie, 1999). Sale of social rented dwellings has also occurred in the Netherlands and France, among others as a result of government policies to encourage home-ownership. Outside Europe, sale of public rented dwellings is an issue as well. For example, the Australian State Housing Authorities sell public rented dwellings, among other reasons to cope with overall financial shortages (Larkin, 2000). Although the Western European institutional, legal, economic and cultural context for the management of privatised housing is much more favourable than in Eastern Europe, the management of privatised housing is not without problems (Bouwcentrum International, 2005). The emerging concerns often centre on the following: former tenants of social rented housing and new owners experience financial problems; social conflicts between homeowners and tenants in partly privatised estates emerge; responsibilities of landlords and tenants remain vaguely defined (Murie, 1999; Priemus et al., 1999; Thomas and Gruis, 2004).

In summary, a very significant share of social rental housing has been privatised or sold to tenants in many countries during the past decades (van der Heijden, 2002). The management of privatised estates with mixed ownership poses various problems regarding property rights and the quality, organisation and financing of maintenance and renewal (Gruis et al., 2005; Gruis and Nieboer, 2004). Thus, the management of privatised housing is an important topic of international concern, which could benefit from an international exchange of knowledge. The book focuses on the following central questions:

- Which sale/privatisation policies have been pursued by governments, public and private landlords in European countries?
- What approaches have been developed to deal with management in such estates?
- Which management problems occur in (partly) privatised estates in Eastern and Western European countries
- What differences and similarities can be found in management approaches and problems between Western and Eastern European countries?
- To what extent can policies and practices be transferred between countries?

The above questions have been addressed by a group of researchers from eight European countries, Australia and China, each from the perspective of their own country. This paper contains a general summary of the results of the project.

Approach

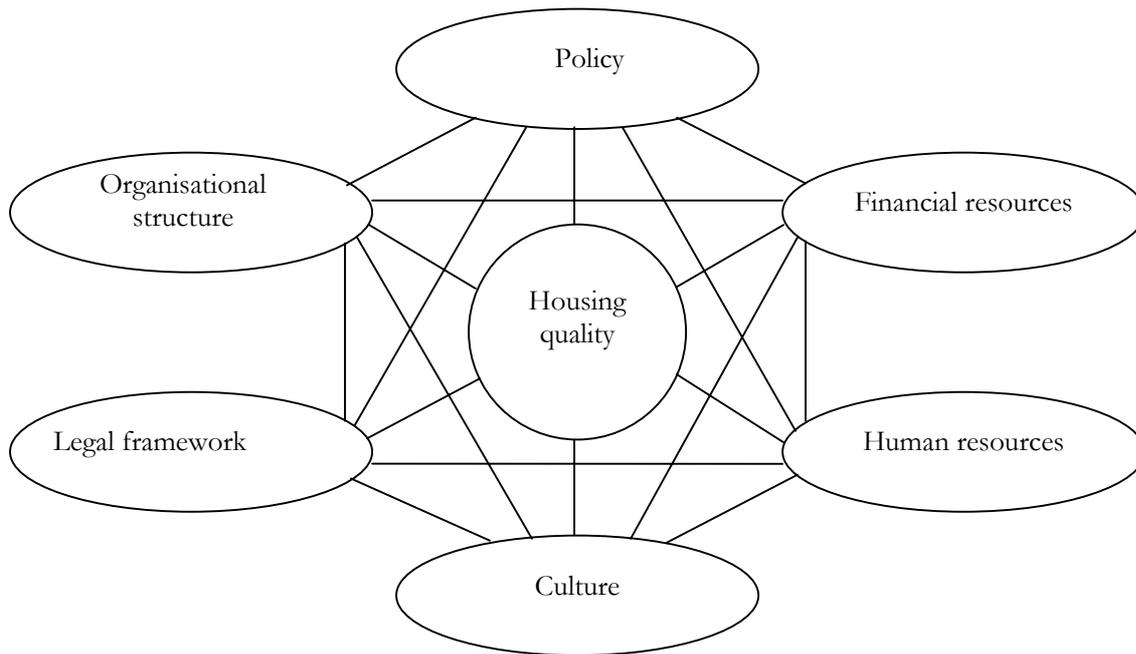
Each of the contributing authors has been invited to explore the challenges for housing management in privatised housing estates with mixed ownership within their country. To facilitate international comparisons we have employed a format for the content of each contribution and a common analytical framework for the analysis of national policies and specific case studies. Furthermore, first drafts were presented to and discussed with each other at a workshop in order to exchange experiences as well as to further align the contents of the individual reports. Thus, in this exploration we rely on conceptual expositions, narratives and quantitative indicators to illustrate the emerging challenges with sensitivity to their cultural, social and organizational legacy.

The general format for each contribution has consisted of:

- A description of national housing context, including a general description of the housing system, policy, market and composition of the housing stock;
- A discussion of the privatisation policies in the past decades and general reflection on the challenges for management of privatized estates;
- One or more case studies of partly privatised estates. These cases could be selected on the basis of their representation of common problems and/or solutions and/or on the basis of the (innovative) approach that has been undertaken to deal with the problems;
- A concluding section, containing a brief summary plus an outlook for the future problems/challenges.

The analytical framework (see Figure 1) draws on elements of organisational management have been recognized in organisational sciences as being crucial for achieving organisational objectives (e.g. Peters and Waterman, 1982; Weggeman, 2003):

- *Policy*: The way in which (and the whole of means by which) the management is being stimulated or carried out by government;
- *Financial resources*: Private and public finance available and/or used for housing management;
- *Human resources*: The available manpower, knowledge & skills;
- *Culture*: The common values, standards and behaviour of the people and organisations involved in housing management and the (resulting) behaviour;
- *Organisational structure*: The institutional and/or organisational structure, formal and/or informal division of tasks and responsibilities relating to various functions of housing maintenance and renewal;
- *Legal framework*: Legislation and procedures used to regulate housing management;
- *Housing quality*: The physical and functional quality of the privatised housing stock, including the need for maintenance and refurbishment.

Figure 1 *Visualisation of analytical framework*

All authors have been asked to fill out a table on the basis of the analytical framework in the concluding section to summarise their findings of the main features, problems and challenges of management of privatised housing in their country. Subsequently, the initial tables filled out by the authors have been edited to increase consistency with the analytical framework and international comparability. It is important to notice, that the edited information provided in this paper has yet to be checked by the authors. The rest of this paper will focus on the results of the project. First, we give a general comparative overview of the housing contexts and privatization policies in the countries involved. Then, we focus on specific policies and challenges for management of privatized housing, employing the various elements within our analytical framework. We conclude with a general reflection on the challenges management of privatized housing and their implications for policy as well as recommendations for further research.

Housing contexts and privatisation policies

As has been stated earlier in this paper, massive privatisation has taken place in many former communist countries. As a result, as we can see in Table 1, high rates of owner-occupation and low rates of public cannot only be found in traditionally capitalist countries, but also in former communist countries. In Serbia and Slovenia, privatisation has almost led to the disappearance of the social housing sector. However, the present figures can be misleading, because they do not tell the tenure of the housing stock before the privatisation policies were effectuated. In Serbia, for example, already 75% of the dwellings were privately owned in 1991, a year after privatisation took off. In Slovenia, 67% of the housing stock was privately owned before privatisation began. Nevertheless, a considerable share of the housing stock has been privatised.

Table 1 *Tenure of the housing stock*

Country	Year	Public rent	Other social rent	Private rent	Owner-occupied	Other/unknown
United Kingdom	2005	11%	8 %	11 %	70%	
The Netherlands	2004	<1%	35%	11 %	54%	
France	2003	10%	9%	24%	56%	1%
Switzerland	2000	2%	12%	51 %	35%	
Australia	2001	4%	22%		66%	8%
Czech Republic	2001	17%	17%	12%	47%	7%
Serbia	2002	2%	No further data given			
Slovenia	2002	6%			92%	1%
Russia	No data given					
China	<1999	82%				

Sources: www.communities.gov.uk (United Kingdom); VROM, 2004 (the Netherlands); Ministère de l'Équipement, 2005; Les Offices de l'Habitat, 2005; Les Entreprises Sociales pour l'Habitat, 2005 (France); Gerheuser, 2004 (Switzerland); ABS Census, 2001 (Australia); Czech Statistical Office Census, 2001 (Czech Republic); Serbia Statistics Office Census 2002 (Serbia); Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia Census 2002 (Slovenia); Wang & Murie, 1999 (China)

It cannot be stated that all former communist countries in the research have experienced a massive housing privatisation, nor can it be said that housing privatisation has been modest in all traditionally capitalist countries. In the Czech Republic, privatisation has taken place in a modest pace. Conversely, the United Kingdom has witnessed a substantial privatisation, first through the introduction of a statutory 'right to buy' for tenants in public dwellings, second through the transfer of housing stock from local authorities to private not-for profit housing associations. The latter phenomenon was also widespread in the Netherlands, where in the 1990s, many municipal housing organisations were transformed into housing associations by changing their legal status, reducing their number from 213 in 1990 to 23 in 2000.

Apart from the Czech Republic, the number of privatised homes has also been low in Switzerland and France. In Switzerland, the share of owner-occupied dwellings in the total housing rose from 31% in 1990 to 35% in 2000, but this growth is mainly administrative. In France, around 4,000 public homes have been sold to households yearly from 1994 to 2004, only 0.1 to 0.2% of the public housing stock. For comparison, this share was approximately 0.5% in the Netherlands (between 10,000 and 20,000 homes per year) in the period 1996-2003, and in Australia between 0.4 and 1.2% per year in the period 1980-1995. An overview of the pace of privatisation is presented in Table 2.

The most important incentives for tenants in the researched countries are 1) a statutory right to buy, 2) price discounts and 3) mortgages with reduced interest rates. Table 3 shows, in which countries these instruments are applied. The table only presents regulations specifically targeted at buyers of public housing. More general policy instruments that apply to a wider group of home purchasers (tax deduction, building subsidies etc.) are excluded from this table. In all former communist countries, the United Kingdom and, to a smaller extent, the Netherlands, price discounts are common. In Russia, dwellings were even offered for free. Despite this, privatisation proceeded slowly in the first years after its start in 1991. In 2003, however, 63% of the homes eligible for privatisation were sold. Mortgages at reduced interest rate and a statutory right to buy are less popular instruments in the researched countries.

Table 2 *Pace of privatisation*

Country	Remarks
United Kingdom	More than 1.5 million homes have been sold to former tenants since its introduction in 1980 until the mid-1990s (Forrest, Gordon & Murie, 1996), a number that has been increased further since then; number of transferred stock is more than 1.0 million until April 2007 (www.communities.gov.uk) on a total stock of 26 million homes in 2005. The public housing sector has declined from 6.3 million homes in 1981 to 2.8 million homes in 2005, whereas the private not-for-profit sector has been quadrupled from 0.5 to 2.1 million homes in the same period.
The Netherlands	10,000 and 20,000 homes sold per year in period 1996-2003 (around ½% of the total social housing stock per year)
France	around 4,000 per year in the period 1994-2004 (0.1-0.2% of the social housing stock)
Switzerland	share of home ownership rose from 31% in 1990 to 35% in 2000
Australia	0.4-1.2% of total stock per year privatised in period 1980-1995, increased percentages afterwards
Czech Republic	no mass privatisation
Serbia	75% in private ownership in 1991; in 2002 this was 98%; privatisation started in 1990
Slovenia	public housing dropped from 33% before privatisation to 11%
Russia	63% of eligible dwellings were privatised in 2003, 12 years after the start of the privatisation program
China	pilot sale in 1979-1987, mass sale 1988-1993, more selective sales 1994-1997; over 80% of public housing has been sold to individuals by the end of in 2002

Table 3 *Some of the most important incentives for tenants to buy their homes*

Country	Right to buy?	Price discounts common?	Mortgages at reduced interest rate common?
United Kingdom	yes	yes	no (right to a mortgage existed from 1980 to 1996)
The Netherlands	no	to a certain extent	no
France	no	no, but possible since 2006	no
Switzerland	no	no	no
Australia	no	no	no
Czech Republic	no	yes, but differs per municipality	no
Serbia	no	yes	no
Slovenia	yes	yes	no
Russia	no, but municipalities are expected to sell off their homes	yes	no
China	no	yes	no

Approaches and challenges for the management of privatized housing

In this section we will present a general summary of approaches and challenges within the countries involved in our research, following the elements of the analytical framework.

Policy

A main feature of central government policies for the stimulation of management of privatised estates in the countries involved in the research is that management primarily is the right and obligation of the joint homeowners. To facilitate management, all countries have developed legislation for the division of rights and responsibilities between the owners. In the UK and Russia adequate management is further stimulated by central government by emphasising and enforcing the role and responsibility of the local governments. The Czech Republic has introduced subsidisation programmes to finance repairs (mainly targeted at prefabricated housing). The implementation of the policies is often problematic, particularly when it comes to enforcing the legal stipulations concerning maintenance.

In many of the countries in our study, the central government has not implemented a specific policy to stimulate the management of privatised estates. In the Netherlands, France and Switzerland this could be explained from the relatively small scale of privatisation as well as the relatively low level of management problems. Furthermore, general legislation existed for the management of estates with multiple owners already existed in these countries and is applied to privatised housing as well. In China, the apparent lack of central government policy seems rather remarkable, considering the scale of privatisation and related management problems.

Legislation

In all of the countries involved in our study, legislation exists regarding the rights and responsibilities of the joint owners, including procedural and organisational requirement for the management structure and voting rules. The level of detail differs from country to country. In many countries, the legislation has important drawbacks, such as the absence of (clear) guidelines for the management of the common facilities, urgent repairs and finance of maintenance (e.g. Serbia, Slovenia). Furthermore, an effective system to enforce the legislation is often lacking (e.g. China, Russia, Czech Republic and Serbia).

Organisation

In almost all countries, an assembly of owners decides over general management policies. Sometimes a chair or board is elected to bear operational management responsibilities. Day-to-day management and maintenance is generally carried out by (professional) housing managers, appointed by the assembly of owners. In most cases, the (former) landlord (often the municipality) carries out this function, particularly when they still hold the majority of the dwellings within the estate (UK, the Netherlands, France, Czech Republic, Serbia, Russia). In the UK, for example, dwellings are usually sold under the RTB as 'leasehold', meaning the (local authority) landlords retain the rights and responsibilities regarding the common facilities. The leasehold owners are involved in management through residents' associations or forums. When blocks have become predominantly leasehold, the landlords may sell their 'freehold' or subcontract management to residents. Private companies can be selected to carry out management in some cases as well (the Netherlands, France, Australia). In China, the assembly employs a property management company (of which most of the staff used to work in public housing management offices). In Australia, pilot projects have been started to contract large-scale redevelopment and management out to private investment companies.

In many countries, problems are reported relating to the organisation of management. There are problems of decision-making due to the absence of a dominant owner and the relatively low frequency of assemblies. Furthermore, in many cases, home-owners' assemblies or associations have not been set up or are too weak to act as a principal for management agencies. Even in countries with a relatively favourable context and few problems such as the UK and the Netherlands, it is recognized that the management of privatised housing requires different institutional structures to adequately combine the interests and participation of home-owners, tenants and landlords.

Financial resources

In all countries, management costs are financed by fees charged to the owners (including the landlord). In some cases, some additional grants are available from local and/or central government for major repairs (Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovenia, Russia). In the Netherlands and France, the landlords' accessibility to own or private finance creates a relatively favourable context for management of privatised estates. Nevertheless, in almost all countries, management budgets are restricted and often insufficient to finance adequate maintenance. These problems are caused by the inability and/or unwillingness to pay (adequate) management fees on the part of the individual home-owners as well as the lack of funding available to the landlords/municipalities – often, the proceedings from privatisation have not been used to build up a maintenance fund. Central government policies are often inadequate to deal with these problems and sometimes even hamper the finance of management. In China, the price cap on the management services discourages improvement of the quality of services. In the UK, local authorities' maintenance budgets are heavily restricted. Therefore, in the UK, stock transfers from local authorities to new or existing private housing associations are seen as an alternative way of privatisation as well as a way to gain more flexible access to financial means. In Australia, the government has taken initiatives to generate a mix of public and private finance for the large-scale redevelopment and management of public housing estates.

Culture

There are substantial differences in the cultural component in the management of privatised estates between 'western' and 'eastern' countries. In general, the households in the western countries are more aware of their management responsibilities (exceptions noted) and particularly the UK and Australia have a relatively long tradition of privatisation. In contrast, many households in the eastern countries seem to have a low level of awareness of their management responsibilities and the potential benefits of adequate maintenance. Many households are stated to have maintained a 'tenant's mentality'. Furthermore, there are problems stemming from a lack of tradition on the side of the landlords as well. They are not always sufficiently aware of their new relationship with the (new) home-owners which requires different approaches towards residents' participation and delivery of services.

Human resources

In most countries, management is carried out by professional companies. In many cases, these companies are either (departments of) the landlord/municipality; in some cases, private management companies are hired. Nevertheless, in many countries problems are mentioned regarding the lack of specific competences that are necessary for the management of the mixed-tenure estates. The problems mentioned vary from a lack of professional staff among the management companies (e.g. Russia, China) and specific expertise about resident participation (France) to a lack of skilled people who can act as representative of the owners' associations (Czech Republic). Furthermore, the landlords' or municipal management

departments often have a quasi monopolistic position and (thus) few incentives to improve their level of service.

Housing quality

As last, but certainly not least aspect of privatised housing, we have looked at the quality of the housing. In many countries, privatised housing estates are of relatively poor quality, in need of (major) repairs and often the situation is becoming worse. There are relatively few problems related to the quality of privatised housing in western countries. This is partly due to the fact that the often the better properties have been sold more frequently. Furthermore, many of the properties that have been privatised in western countries are single-family dwellings, which do not lead to the problems of management of joint facilities associated with apartment blocks. Nevertheless, also in the Western European countries concerns are raised about the repairs due to a lack of funds and the limited possibilities to carry out major repairs in the future due to mixed-ownership.

Implications for policy

The case studies in this project have emphasized the importance of common themes in housing policies in different countries such as: privatization to increase homeownership, greater role of the private sector in the management and financing of housing; shift to demand-based subsidies and incentives to encourage privatization, and selectivity of intervention. Although not explicitly related to convergence, the studies acknowledge the fundamental shift away from comprehensive housing policies to selective intervention and experimentation. What is interesting is that the privatization and other corresponding changes in housing policies have a different impact on the management of housing and housing quality. The case studies emphasize the diversity of responses to emerging challenges. In particular, nationally specific strategies and policies pertaining to legislation, organizational structures, financial and human resources of housing management in privatized housing increasingly map a diverging experience across countries. This is particularly evident between countries where governments have adopted a cautious approach to privatization (The Netherlands, France), compared to the ones where privatization policies are the flagship of change in the last decade (Serbia, Slovenia). In the first group of countries privatization has taken place with little adjustment to management structures and financial arrangements, while in the latter—the policy framework has transferred these responsibilities to the new owners, albeit with limited success. It also appears that in countries where the share of social (non-market) housing is relatively large, the privatization of housing is perceived as a tool to manage the existing portfolio (France, The Czech Republic), while in countries with a relatively small social housing share, privatization policies simply continue to cut back on government funding in the sector, shifting the burden of housing maintenance and renewal to often low income households (Australia, Serbia).

The case studies demonstrate that so far there has not been a systematic attempt to address the issue of housing management in privatised housing, even in countries where the policy has been implemented for an extended period of time (Britain). In the countries under review, incremental policies through ‘trial and error’ continue to reshape the legal framework and organisational structures for housing management, focusing on problems to be remedied rather than strategic options. In the spirit of incrementalism, the policy evolution outlined in the comparative case studies does not imply fundamentally new approaches to the way housing management is financed and/or resources for major repairs and renewal mobilised. It also points to the growing challenges of mixed ownership in housing estates where technical,

organisational, financial and social problems place competing demands on housing management. Notwithstanding the diversity of responses, the case studies suggest that the choice of policy responses is shaped by a variety of contextual factors, governments' past experiences, and the responses by affected social groups—tenants and new owners.

In Eastern Europe and China, the country specific studies demonstrate that wide political and economic restructuring as well as the new financial and institutional arrangements have ensured less government involvement in housing. A harsher public expenditure regime has led to less investment in social housing, a move to demand-based subsidies and government support that favors access to home ownership. The direction of change is no doubt the same as in Western Europe and Australia, and the underlying elements are similar. However, changes in the housing systems in Eastern Europe are much more dramatic at least in the early 1990s, which has wider repercussions for the way housing management operates in the privatization aftermath. The 'sensible politics' of incremental adjustment described in these case studies need to be placed in the context of an overall system transformation where extensive government intervention with generous and comprehensive housing subsidies was eliminated and wholesale approaches to privatization implemented.

Concluding remarks

The understanding of differences and similarities in housing policies and practice following the privatisation of housing in the East and the West compels a deeper exploration of the housing reform path and the emerging challenges. This research project contributes to this process in two particular ways. First, it demonstrates that in different cultural settings similar processes and policy interventions can have quite different outcomes and implications in the area of housing management. Second, it broadens the focus of current debates beyond a predominant occupation with privatization, subsidies and housing inequalities. This is achieved through explicit emphasis on housing management and the relationship between housing policies, organisational structures, human and financial resources and housing quality. The view is that housing management in privatised housing as embedded in the specific institutional and cultural contexts, and operating in distinctive ways, influences housing quality. The link between housing policy intervention and housing management in the conceptual framework for this comparative research establishes a good basis for policy comparisons, learning and diffusion of good practices.

In addition to these insights in comparative perspective, the research project identifies several key factors/determinants of the evolution of housing management systems in privatized housing. It also emphasizes the importance of interrelated outcomes: resultant legal and institutional framework, adequacy of financial and human resources, the specifics of culture and cultural norms influencing the operational aspects of housing management, and overall housing quality achieved through the operation/implementation of integrated aspects of a housing management system. Finally, this research is only a small step toward a greater understanding of the diffusion of good practice in the management of privatized housing. Future research is needed to: a) test, compare, and evaluate the framework against empirical findings; b) examine the transformation/adaptation/adjustment of the housing management systems to emerging challenges; and c) explore innovations, ideas, practices, and methods implemented to meet diverse local needs.

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