



October 2014

International Tenants Day

Lessons learnt

The International Tenants Day took place this year on October 6, in Brussels, and was attended by 190 participants. Theme of the day was “**tenants’ empowerment and responsible housing**”.

The day was split in two different parts: a morning session consisting of panel debates, and the afternoon dedicated to the **European Responsible Housing Initiative’s** outcomes and awards¹.

Tenants’ participation was the **leitmotiv** of the panel debates, focusing on four different dimensions of “responsible housing”: local social sustainability, the environment, economic responsibility and sustainability, good governance and fair relations with stakeholders.

Margaret Burgess (Minister for Housing and Welfare, Scotland) opened the day with a speech on Scottish social housing policies. The Housing Act 2010 created an independent “**Scottish Housing Regulator**” to look after the interests of tenants, homeless people and other users of social landlords’ services. On the basis of inputs from tenants and other service users, Ministers set the outcomes that social landlords should achieve.



Margaret Burgess addressing the audience

Those outcomes are included in the “**Scottish Social Housing Charter**”², and they are used by the Regulator to assess a landlord’s performance. Tenants’ democracy is a key element of Scottish social housing policies, and it effectively contributes to the formulation of policies. The Scottish Charter should be a model for other countries in the EU.

Mellouki Cadat (senior advisor at MOVISIE and co-chair of Amsterdam’s tenants union) is another active resident of the Indian quarter. He pointed out that increased cooperation between the city districts, professional welfare providers, housing corporations and residents «*based on possibilities, strengths and responsibilities of each other*» led to multiple activities, initiatives and projects in the neighbourhood.



Mellouki Cadat (MOVISIE), Shazia Ishaq (Foundation MOI) and Ronald Paping (Nederlandse Woonbond)

«*This ambition for **cooperation** is not new, but the manner in which different organisation cooperate with residents and the city district is*». This new way is a “social cohesion think tank”, gathering different actors which work for the same goal: strengthening community links in order to solve local problems and create an inclusive environment.

¹ <http://www.responsiblehousing.eu/en/>

² <http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/>

Shazia Ishaq (Foundation MOI) showed how partnerships between housing providers and social NGOs can produce economic and **social returns** for local communities. Shazia is a committed resident and key person in Amsterdam's Indian quarter. After giving free language courses in a Bollywood shop, she initiated Foundation MOI for social support, integration and debt assistance. She now receives support from the city district, and help tenants with different kind of problems.

Josiane Lamotte and **Marie Androdias-Galindo** (CNL elected tenants' representatives) explained how tenants' participation is organised in France. Every 4 years, social housing tenants democratically elect their representatives (*administrateurs*) to the Board of housing associations.³ Tenants' representatives sit on the boards of directors and have their say. Their role is to bring issues to the attention of the top management and propose solutions in the interest of tenants. They have a say – for instance – in discussion about budget and rent increases. When it comes to **energy refurbishment**, they negotiate with social landlords to ensure lower housing costs for tenants.



Josiane Lamotte (CNL)

James Jones (tenant in Wales) reported his experience as both tenant and employee of the same company. His landlord provided him not only with a roof, but also with training opportunities, resulting later in to a permanent employment. He

³<http://www.lacnl.com/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=1042&cntnt01returnid=15>

showed how – by creating jobs – a social housing association contributes to the **local economy** and prevents rent arrears in an inclusive way.

Sander Scheurwater (RICS' Head of external affairs and EU liaison) pointed out that responsible housing makes an essential contribution to the economy, by opening the way for better life opportunities to low/medium income groups. In previous times, Sander was tenant in a Dutch social housing estate, but he realised that just when he started his studies at university. This shows how the **Dutch social housing model** opens opportunities to everyone.



Sander Scheurwater (RICS)

Dorte Skovgård (tenant in Copenhagen) was asked about **tenants' democracy** in Denmark. In her country tenants participation is well structured and institutionalised. By law, tenants' representatives are members of the board of housing associations and have decision-making power. As highlighted by **Lukas Siebenkotten** (DMB Director), the reality is quite different in Germany, where tenants are excluded from decisions that have an impact on their daily life. *«At the general assembly of the German tenants union in 2011 we pushed for institutionalised tenants' participation by law. Unfortunately there is no progress in Germany. Therefore the DMB hopes that many housing providers will sign the Code of Conduct of the European Responsible Housing Initiative».*

Michaela Kauer (City of Vienna's Head of Liaison office to the EU) pointed out that **partnership and dialogue** between tenants associations and local authorities is essential to meet the needs of inhabitants and build better communities. She mentioned several initiatives of the City of Vienna (both top-down and bottom-up) which allow tenants to participate and contributes to enhancing neighbourhoods.

A voluntary agreement for responsible housing in Europe

The **International Union of Tenants, Housing Europe** (European federation for public, cooperative and social housing) and **Delphis** (association gathering 26 non-profit social housing companies in France) finalised a twofold agreement on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), including a **Code of Conduct for housing providers**⁴ and a European Declaration signed by EU stakeholders in the housing sector. Affordable housing providers agree on **clear principles for sustainable investment** in building construction, renovation, neighbourhoods, and human resources, as well as on **fair relations with stakeholders**, notably the tenants. Through the **European Declaration**, housing stakeholders call **for the development of CSR in public, cooperative and social housing**.⁵

Michael Ludwig (Housing Councillor City of Vienna) on the signing of the European Declaration: *«We note that the housing sector has been undergoing a significant transformation. Residents must be able to rely on Responsible Housing all over Europe. This is why we welcome the initiative of the ERHIN project, giving all housing providers a strong guideline to further develop and adapt housing policies towards present and future needs of fair and ethical housing».*

Barbara Steenbergen (IUT's Head of Liaison office to the EU) on the essence of the Declaration: *«The mission of a responsible housing provider is not only to put a roof over one's head. Responsibility means to work in partnership with stakeholders in order to create social and economic returns for citizens and communities. This joint commitment is formalised by the European Declaration on Responsible housing».*

Sorcha Edwards (Housing Europe's Secretary General) on the objectives of the Code of Conduct: *«We have developed a Code of Conduct to help housing providers embed CSR principles in their strategy and operations, and better fulfil their mission to provide affordable, good quality housing and services, responding to a variety of needs».*

⁴ <http://www.responsiblehousing.eu/en/Responsible-Housing-CSR-Code-of-Conduct/Code-of-Conduct/>

⁵ <http://www.responsiblehousing.eu/en/Responsible-Housing/European-Declaration-on-Responsible-Housing/>



Michael Ludwig (City of Vienna), Barbara Steenbergen and Sven Bergensträhle (IUT) handling the Declaration



Sorcha Edwards (Housing Europe) handling the CSR Code of Conduct for housing providers

First edition of the European Responsible Housing Awards



EUROPEAN RESPONSIBLE HOUSING AWARDS 2014

Best CSR practices in the housing sector were rewarded during the European Responsible Housing Awards Ceremony. The **winning organisations** in the five categories were:

- **RCT Homes** (Wales) in “economic responsibility and sustainability”, for its extensive vocational training programs targeting young tenants
- **Eigen Haard** (Netherlands) in “local social sustainability”, for enhancing neighbourhoods through partnerships with local associations
- **Société Dauphinoise de l’Habitat** (France) in “environmental sustainability” for renovating buildings at zero cost for the tenants
- **Dansk Almennyttigt Boligselskab** (Denmark) in “good governance and fair relations with stakeholders”, for effective residential democracy and tenants’ empowerment
- **Habitat 62/59 Picardie** (France) in “responsible human resources management”, for ensuring safety at work in an inclusive and innovative way.

Marco Curavić (European Commission, DG Enterprise) welcome the initiative as «*a lighthouse project in the sector, which will contribute to the spread of CSR practices in the European Union*».

News in brief

Juncker’s team approved by European Parliament

The new Juncker Commission was approved on October 22 after European Parliament’s vote in

Strasbourg. With 423 votes in favour, 209 against and 67 abstentions, the Parliament gave the “green light” to the new 27 commissioners. The positive vote came from a coalition consisting of the three main groups in the Parliament: EEP, S&D and ALDE. Juncker said this will be a «**last chance Commission**», meaning that the EU will possibly not have another chance to bring European citizens close to Europe. He also said that he wants Europe to have «*a social triple A, which is as important as having an economic and financial triple A*». ⁶

The IUT will monitor the work of the new Commission, especially when it has strong links to national housing policies. A list of commissioners whose portfolios are relevant to our activities follows:

- Frans Timmermans (Better regulation, inter-institutional relations, rule of law and charter of fundamental rights)
- Maroš Šefčovič (Energy union)
- Jyrki Katainen (Jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness)
- Miguel Arias Cañete (Climate action and energy)
- Marianne Thyssen (Employment, social affairs, skills and labour mobility)
- Margrethe Vestager (Competition)
- Věra Jourová (Justice, consumers and gender equality)
- Corina Crețu (Regional policy)

The new commission still needs to be formally appointed by European Council before taking office on November 1st.

Flexible energy targets for 2030

On October 23, EU leaders committed to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by at least 40% by 2030. However, the efficiency and renewable targets were watered down. The European Commission’s proposal for 30 % **efficiency goal** was reduced to 27% across the EU. Moreover, the EU level target is not legally binding at the national level or EU level and will be reviewed in 2020. The **renewables target** of at least 27% is binding at EU-wide level but, after opposition from several countries (firstly UK), it will not be binding at national level. All three targets are compared to 1990 levels.

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6 <http://www.euractiv.com/video/juncker-will-be-last-chance-commission-309405>