

GLOBAL TENANT



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IUT member organisations in:

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Cover photo by IUT: Gas street lamps
in Berlin

"There is a naive belief that ownership makes you happy. Rubbish!"

Since I learned to spell 'segregation', all the politicians I've met, from right to left, have assured me that they really want to break down the invisible walls that separate people. Yet segregation continues to increase, day by day.

Some weeks ago when I chaired The Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning conference in southern town of Karlskrona, I met the amicable Swedish minister Mats Odell, who believes that converting rental flats to tenant-owner dwellings in 'Million Program' areas, a 1960s Swedish housing scheme, is the solution to the problem. "Selling off social housing can lead to integrated living", the minister believes. "All endeavours and proposals make me happy, but for many living in the concrete jungle the offer is like a cruel joke. My aunts in the suburbs can hardly afford a travel card nowadays. Not to mention the congestion charges, which I voted for because I'm committed to the environment, but forget the human aspect. Both the price increases on travel cards and the congestion charges serve to cement segregation. Little things make a big difference."

"My family and relatives in the suburbs are now getting subtle queries about converting their flats. They don't live in scenic Lidingö or in Liljeholmen, but in suburbs that from the very start have been criticised, categorised and routinely been called ghettos."

Not many jump at the chance. And rightly so. Because a rental conversion, in an impoverished Million Program area transformed into temporary refugee accommodation, is hardly attractive. Who would rush to the bank and ask for a loan? The Somali refugee family who arrived destitute 3 years ago or my 60 year old dad who works hard for his one-week holiday a year?

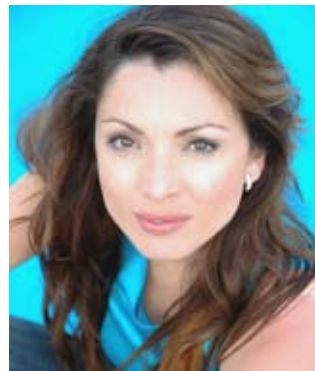
A few cities in the world, like New York and Athens, have managed to renovate and revamp run-down areas and transform them into cool areas. Both the Meatpacking District and Gazi in Athens used to be disgraces that now attract moneyed groups. If a politician would make a push for Rinkeby, Tensta, Hjulsta, Alby, Fittja, Ronna and all the other suburbs to get a total makeover, rental conversions would be a good deal for those involved.

There is a naive belief that ownership makes you happy. Rubbish. If all poor suburb-dwellers would be conned into borrowing heaps of money to buy a home that will most likely just decrease in value, the consequences would be catastrophic. Then they wouldn't just be poor, they would be poor and in debt.

I hope I'm wrong. In that case I'm open to letters from hale and hearty, comfortable Swedish families wanting to buy a flat in Rinkeby as an investment.

by Alexandra Pascalidou.

Debater, author



Calendar

2007

November 22-24: The 7th Workshop on Housing the Poor, Bangkok, Thailand.

December 5: Regulating and Developing the Private rented sector, London England

December 13: Conf. on Chinas' Urban Land and Housing in the 21st Century, Hong Kong

2008

February 20-22: Australian National Housing Conference, Sydney Australia

April 2-3: National Housing Days in Gävle, Sweden

April 2-4: Housing and Cohesion, University of York, England

June 14-15: Swedish Union of Tenant's national conference in Luleå

August 1-3: TPAS Annual conference, Birmingham, England.

October 13-27: Fourth session of the UN World Urban Forum in Nanjing, China

For more info: www.iut.nu/conferences.htm

Privatisation and capitalisation of Rental Housing – and effects

By Anna Eklöf, SUT/IUT

The overall theme for the IUT Congress in Berlin was Privatisation and capitalisation of Rental Housing – and effects. A majority of the participating tenant organisations are experiencing the very same tendencies of privatisation.

The congress agreed on a position paper that stated that the privatisation and following lack of affordable rental housing continues to be one major ingredient to increased social exclusion and that it hinders integration.

International investors are becoming increasingly interested in buying big chunks of municipal housing stocks, particularly in Europe. Large scale selling of public housing, such as in Dresden Germany, where 45,000 flats were sold in one piece to the American investor Fortress, must be stopped!

Rental housing down by 14 per cent

In Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, IUT member organisations testify of a recent political shift in the housing policy area, towards a more liberal, market-friendly model where space for public, non-profit housing is rapidly decreasing.

In Eastern Europe, post-communist privatisation has created a new row of problems. Organisations in Slovenia, Macedonia and in the Czech Republic report that the existing policy has led up to a gruelling situation, where tenants lack protection and cannot afford maintenance. This, in turn, thwarts economic growth and stability, since it hinders labour and service mobility.

The summary of the congress report gives that the rental housing sector in Europe has decreased by an average 14 percent, from 37 percent 1990 to 24 percent in 2003.

The extent of privatisation differs between countries, but the consequences are the same; social change with increased segregation, insecurity and lack of protection of tenants rights. The International Union of Tenants will therefore continue to act and safeguard the right to affordable housing for all.



Success story from Holland

Not all is bad and negative for tenants

In 2004 the present conservative government in the Netherlands aimed at liberalising 25 per cent of the important and generally liked social housing stock in the Netherlands. But in spite of these aims, the landlords and the government, as the Woonbond actually predicted, lost the battle and the Woonbond won the war!

We successfully delayed the political decision making process until the next election for government. The legislation proposal necessary to implement the plans of the former housing minister Dekker did not survive the elections in November 2006. We delayed the process just long enough to prevent the introduction of more free market policies in the rental housing sector. Also, our Dutch housing system with a high percentage of rental and social housing has always been popular among the Dutch citizens.

Rich housing corporations

The liberalisation plans are eliminated and the agreement within the present government, Christian-Social democratic, states that the yearly rent increase will follow inflation. As a result the rent increases in 2007 are maximized at the historically low inflation rate of 1,1 percent.

Furthermore, the government wants to increase investments in urban renewal,



Just made it over the drawbridge in Amsterdam! PHOTO: IUT

renovation and production of new affordable houses. The Dutch housing corporations will most probably be forced to invest largely, because every politician now knows that the housing corporations have a lot of money at their disposal. The Woonbond has pointed out that there are billions of euros which are not needed for operational costs and maintenance. So, there was actually no need at all, as were the aims of the previous government, to increase the rent income of the housing associations by deregulating and raising rents.

Advantage – owners!

But still, tenants in Holland have to meet with increasing housing costs. The average rent quote has risen from 21,6 percent in 2002 to 24,2 percent in 2006.

Furthermore, since 2004 there has been a cut in rent subsidies. This has implications for about one million tenants with low incomes. Also, tenants and homeowners are being treated very unequally; Homeowners can fully deduct the inter-

est on their mortgage from their income before taxes. This advantage for owners costs the state about 14 billion euros a year, while costs for rent subsidies amount to only about 2 billion euros a year.

Finally, there is still also a serious shortage of affordable rental housing in the Netherlands.

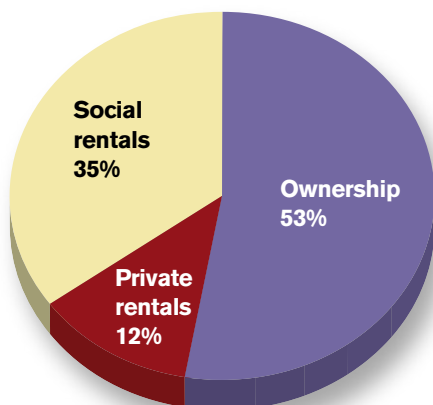
Measures to be taken

The general development of Dutch housing looks definitely more promising than two years ago. Nevertheless, there is yet a lot to accomplish. In the coming years the Woonbond will focus on new, offensive issues such as improved tenant participation, lowering living costs by energy reduction and a stronger neighbourhood policy.

By Ronald Paping,
General Director
of the Woonbond, the
Netherlands



Dwellings by tenure, the Netherlands 2002



ROME, ITALY:

To occupy a house is not a crime for someone who is poor

This was the sensational court verdict of an Italian court in September.

The Cassation Court acquitted, according to article 2 in the Italian constitution, 39 year old Giuseppa D. a single mother from Rome who had illegally entered an empty building. The decision was accompanied by another decree that gives “the full legitimacy of local governments to seize uninhabited houses for evicted families.”

In the first judgment, Ms Giuseppa D. had been ordered to pay a fine of 600 Euro for illegally having entered and occupied the house. Guiseppa appealed to the Cassation Court stressing that there had been done no “investigation” concerning specific conditions of poverty. She had not had the opportunity to find housing in the free market. Guiseppa also claimed that she had acted in a state of desperation and acute need for shelter



SICET and SUNIA demonstrate for affordable housing. PHOTO: SICET

for her and her son, giving reference to the “right to housing and the right to protection of health”.

A judgment that divides

The Supreme Court has upheld the complaint and remitted the case to the Court of Appeal which will have to pay “more attention and have a penetrating judicial investigation on the woman’s state of poverty”.

The judgement by the Cassation Court has caused strong sentiments, and reactions are divided between “for and against”. Mr Guido Piran, Secretary General of the Italian tenant organisation SICET, warmly welcomed the decision and said that this verdict “added an important factor that was missing on the Italian legal landscape.”

Mr Piran also said that a dwelling is not a constitutional right in Italy. But, having somewhere to live, a house or

a flat, is a major ingredient to a person’s personality and pride. Homelessness is disruptive for everyone’s self-esteem and physical and mental health.

Source: Messaggero, 26 September and Corriere della Sera, 27 September:

N.B. Cassation Court: a supreme court that has the possibility to annul the decision taken by a court of lower instance, but can not change the decision. The case is brought back to a lower instance.

CANADA:

UN Rapporteur criticizes Canadian housing

The visit to Canada in October by Miloon Kothari, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, did shine a spotlight on the shocking lack of affordable housing options in a country as rich as Canada.



Successive federal and provincial governments have pledged to address the problem, but all have fallen far short of meeting the growing demand for reasonably priced housing for low-income families and individuals.

What is lacking is a co-ordinated federal-provincial housing strategy, in effect a national plan that would ensure every Canadian has a decent place to call home.

Such a blueprint must take a three-pronged approach: 1. new construction of affordable homes, 2. rent subsidies and 3. renovation of existing homes.

The three areas need to be tackled together, not in isolation or in any prescribed order.

As a key leg of the three-pronged strategy, it is imperative that Ottawa kick-start a renewed national housing program with a goal of building up to 200,000 affordable and co-operative housing units over the next 10 years. The homes are needed in cities, rural areas and native reserves.

The second leg of the strategy should be a greatly expanded rent supplement program. Obviously, new affordable housing cannot be built fast enough to meet existing demand. That is why paying subsidies

to put low-income residents into vacant rental units is necessary. While some housing advocates view rent supplements as a short-term measure that does not solve the overall problem, such subsidies do provide temporary support and needed housing for those in desperate need.

The third part of the strategy would be a major commitment to renovate public housing that is aging and falling into disrepair. In Toronto alone, the city’s 58,000 units of public housing require an estimated \$300 million in repairs. Many of those buildings are now more than 50 years old, with plumbing that leaks and ceilings that are cracked.

Source: The Toronto Star, Editorial by Elaine Carey: “A 3-point strategy for better housing”, October 28.



Brunnsvik offers perfect settings for discussions.

Caring about our future

By Jacob Witzell and Magnus Hammar

Five young members of the Swedish Union of Tenants worrying about suburbs in decay, increasing segregation and lack of affordable housing for them and future generations decided to try and find like-minded people who would be ready to meet and talk it over.

Following a political decision in the 1950's to get even with the housing shortage, Swedish architects and city planners set out to plan for large housing estates, like elsewhere in Europe, which resulted in the construction of one million flats in mostly panel houses built between 1965 and 1974. A quarter of all residential buildings in Sweden today originates from the "Million Homes Program"- era.

Most of these new homes found their settings surrounded by nature, but disconnected from historical centres on the outskirts of larger cities. These suburbia's of efficient mass production are now entering their 50's, and physical decline is calling for urgent attention in the years to come.

Whereas the tenant movement in its early days, a century ago, struggled to secure tenure, keep rents down and

improve poor housing standards, e.g. basic sanitary conditions, the most difficult challenge today is how to reverse the increasing socio-economic differences between neighbourhoods and to reverse increasing segregation. Could it possibly be that towns and housing areas erected in the 60's and 70's were left half done?

No pre-packed solutions

Five young elected representatives from the Swedish Union of Tenants (SUT) had for many weeks planned for a three-day conference - no, not a conference – a happening! The aim had been to get hold of young people, young adults, interested in their housing environment, without preconceived minds but full of new fresh ideas. A part of the strategy for avoiding discussions that involved ready-made thoughts and views was to invite young

people who previously had had no direct contact with the SUT. So, the majority of the 75 participants were from this latter category, which was controversial in some old timers' eyes. Why spend money and resources on those who might not become active and regular members...

On August 24, at the perfect retreat from everyday hustle of urban life, about 75 young adults, most in their 20's, got together at Brunnsvik Folk High School situated some four hours north of Stockholm. The organisers had managed to bring together a good mix of young men and women, each with different experiences and perspectives.

The charm of getting engaged in a movement, perhaps in an already existing NGO or perhaps just with a group of like-minded people, are the free unbiased dialogues and discussions about

how our society and our environment should function and look like.

What is status?

Day one started out almost from scratch. The participants were asked about which housing related issues were of their interest. The discussions were deliberately set off with very little instructions, and the participants were asked to discuss, in small groups, the conceptions of “status” and “atmosphere”.

What status involves living in a particular area or neighbourhood? And how is status connected to atmosphere? Both conceptions can be interpreted in many ways and the discussions gave evidence on how complex and intricate issues on housing can be. Of course, the many different interpretations are results of different backgrounds and experiences.

Neighbourhoods after 40

During the two days many issues were covered and discussed, such as housing policies, rent setting policies, the prime cost principle, tenant participation, social cohesion, segregation and more. The debate often touched on housing on a broader perspective; why different neighbourhoods become what they are – in this case after 40 years. What factors contribute and perhaps guide this development, and how to reverse a negative development.

Eco-suburb

One group discussed the suburb from an ecological perspective. How could possibly Bagarmossen, a typical 60's suburb in Stockholm, develop into becoming an



Meeting committed friends at Brunnsvik; Sina Yezan and Ramona Szmid. PHOTO: OLA HEDIN

eco-suburb? Could possibly a 60's / 70's suburb become more attractive by becoming outstanding in eco-living, become an experimental town? Could a market place with eco-products from allotment gardens attract new residents, and visitors? And an annual harvest festival!

Meaning of local history

Another group debated whether the status and pride of a neighbourhood can increase if its history is traced back and described. Even though the present buildings are only 40 years old, and much has probably been documented about the area's present history – there is of course a much older history to be told. Who were those people, perhaps farmers, who lived in the area some 100 years ago? Are there traces of old manufacturing industries? Where do all the place names come from?

It is easy to find books about the old well-established and high statutes garden suburbs of Stockholm and Göteborg, but nothing much about Fittja, Tensta and Hammarkullen. It is about identity and common grounds!



Participants at the Brunnsvik youth seminar discuss future housing models. From left; Andreas Sidkvist, Mubarik Abdirahman, Anna Adolfsson and Jonathan D. Sikell. PHOTO: YLVA LARSSON

Ideas were widespread and ardently discussed. But there was also consensus; ideas and solutions must come from below, from the residents themselves. We all too often agree to this concept, but we are also aware of the fact that we are most often led and told what to do from political ideas and initiatives – yes, from above. In spite of the knowledge that there is much willingness and knowledge stored in the peoples' minds.

Several participants also reminded us about the 1990's, when costly “special projects” were introduced in “exposed neighbourhoods”. Yes, they were well intended, but unfortunately they had a tendency to dwindle away when the money was gone.

Right to buy

The presence of the Swedish Union of Tenants, SUT, to a large extent disappeared from these suburbs when Swedes moved out and immigrants moved in, in the 1970's and 80's. The SUT is still having great difficulties attracting non-Swedes in these areas. Also, at the same time shops and banks moved out, cash dispensers were closed and community infrastructure changed for the worse.

After twenty years of neglect the housing estates from the 60's and 70's are finally becoming a big political issue. Hundreds of panel houses and hundreds of thousands of flats are in urgent need for renovation and repairs, costing billions of Swedish kronas. This is being debated at the same time as the political right wing coalition in Stockholm are offering the tenants, for very favourable prices, to buy their houses and flats. So the question is - who should pay for the renovation? The possible future owners or the present owners – the municipal housing companies?

Tenant participation – now!

This weekend at Brunnsvik was a kick-off. New ideas and models were introduced for the Swedish Union of Tenants when considering new plans of action. The SUT has already decided to become actively involved in the physical development of the many suburbs from the 60's and 70's. But this time we must adopt a holistic plan for these housing areas which of course should primarily involve the residents. This time we will not accept a physical cosmetic improvement of just the buildings. New sustainable social and physical solutions must be sought for.

Brasilia

– one of it's kind

By David Dahmén, Freelance journalist

In Brazil, like in other Latin American countries, the governmental housing policies have emphasized the promotion of homeownership in formal housing markets as the best way of satisfying the housing needs of the population, assigning renting an inferior status. Only 14% of the 42 million housing stock in Brazil is rented; home ownership is at 75%, while other categories make up for the remaining 11%.

The capital of Brazil, Brasilia, was built between 1956 and 1960. The government of the time was socialist, promoting large state owned enterprises. Lucio Costa, the planner selected to design the city, was a Marxist and student of Le Corbusier. The stunning architecture of Brasilia is largely created by famous architect Oscar Niemeyer, based on his experience from working with the UN building in New York in the late 1940's

The land on which Brasilia was built was entirely acquired by the state and the construction of highways, government offices, shopping centres and housing were designed and built under direct government supervision without any market input. To this day, undeveloped land is still in government hands or under strict government control and no formal land market exists within the Federal District, although most already built buildings can be bought and sold on the market.

A capital as an aeroplane

The city's lay out is in the shape of an air-plane, with the government offices in the cockpit and the residential areas in the wings. The aircraft body has all the min-



The plane-like city plan of Brasilia.

istries and governmental offices lined up, one after the other, like rows in a typical passenger section. Along the wings, are large six storey apartment blocks, so called Super-Quadras. Each Supra-Quadra houses 3.000 people and has its own primary school. Every four Quadras also have a library, police station, supermarket and secondary school.

– Everything is so very accessible. You do not have to waste any time commuting to and from work, and you will find any service you might need next door, says Jose Joacir Dos Santos, a diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As a government employee, he is fairly well off, and only has to pay 264 reais (150 US \$) a month for a three room apartment, excluding gas and electricity, which would otherwise cost thousands of reais.

The subsidized rent is some sort of compensation, since I spend so few days in my apartment, adds Dos Santos. A sort of a climate/geographical allowance.

Living in the satellites

As rents in the central parts of Brasilia can be very high, many people have moved out to the satellite suburbs, where rents are substantially lower. A teacher or a policeman would have to spend most of their salaries to pay the rent if they were to live in the central parts of Brasilia.

In the satellites, however, it's a different story. Here a small flat is about 500 reais (290 US \$) a month, some 25 per cent of a police officers' salary. However, many flats in the suburbs are poorly equipped, often lacking the most basic equipment. The satellite suburbs, originally planned to be three in all, are con-



Mr Jose Joacir Dos Santos outside his house, owned by the government
Photo: D. Dahmén

stantly growing, now numbering 13!

Due to the exodus from central Brasilia, a growing number of new flats are left empty. This is a major concern to the city authorities, since empty blocks not only challenge the perfect balance and harmony of central Brasilia, but also attract criminal activities, which Brasilia has been spared of so far. Crime has mainly been a problem for the satellite suburbs.



Underground/metro carriage with SUT / Hyresgästföreningen logo Photo: IUT

Sweden's affordable rental housing squeezed between the EU and government

Swedish Union of Tenants launches massive campaign

The generally liked housing policy in Sweden is under threat. The Swedish government has shown, through their politics, that they dislike the present rental housing system with municipally owned rental housing and collectively negotiated rents between the representatives of the tenants and landlords.

Housing experts predict that costs for renters will increase by 20 per cent in 2008, compared to costs for owners. This is due primarily to tax benefits for homeowners and abolition of investment subsidies.

The Swedish Property Federation is lobbying both the national government and the EU Commission to push for a new rent setting system, with market rents for the first tenant in newly built houses. The utility value rent setting system, stated in the Swedish law, is heavily questioned, by the right wing Coalition and its associ-



636,000 young persons will soon move out from their parents' - and there are only 4,000 available rental flats.

ates. The Coalition promotes the selling of municipally owned houses to the sitting tenants, for heavily subsidised prices – an offer very few can resist.

But not all can afford, or are willing, to buy. See Alexandra Pascalidou's chronicle on page 2.

Also, a recent survey shows that 636,000 young Swedes will need housing in the next five years – and most of them want a rental flat.

The Swedish Union of Tenants has launched its most massive campaign ever with an object to put pressure on the Swedish government to come to a halt with its plans – which have no or little support among the citizens.

The campaign includes:

- television advertising, showing students/graduates happily leaving high-school, for an uncertain future – house wise (photo).
- film commercials, cinemas
- campaign poster on advertising pillars.
- posters in entrance halls
- underground/metro carriage – see photo
- postal cards to housing minister Odell

IUT congress 2007

The future of rental housing is always on the agenda of the IUT

By Magnus Hammar, IUT

The almost 100 delegates from 26 countries at the IUT congress in Berlin, September 20–23, all participated with great enthusiasm and contributed to an overall high spirit that characterized the congress.

Ms Ingeborg Junge-Reyer, Mayor of Berlin, opened the congress by committing herself and the city of Berlin to retain the important and large rental sector in Berlin.

Dr. Klaus Töpfer, former Executive Director of the UN Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi and also former German Housing Minister, spoke about the importance of IUT not only working in developed countries but also in developing countries.

IUT President Mr Sven Carlsson highlighted the concrete proposal to establish an IUT representation in Brussels, with the European Union. IUT's expansion from one office, the Secretariat in Stockholm, to a second office in Brussels is historical, from an IUT perspective.

Dr. Franz-Georg Rips, Director as well as President of the German tenant organisation, the Deutscher Mieterbund e.V. said that Germany is a tenant country, with around 57 % of all households being tenants. But, the present government wants to increase ownership, at the same time as there increasing social polarisation and lack of affordable housing – 15 % of all German households need public housing assistance.

The congress warmly welcomed far-away delegates; Penny Carr and Pat Cora from the Tenants Union in Queensland, Australia, and Mr Ludger B. Nyoni who represented the tenants in Tanzania. Japan was represented by Mr Kazuo Takashima from the Japanese Tenants Association. Mr Michael Kane from the National Alliance of HUD Tenants represented USA. Prof. Yelena Shomina from Moscow said she was hoping to establish a tenants association in Russia.

Being an organisation that besides



Prof. Yelena Shomina, Russia.



Ludger B. Nyoni, TTA / Tanzania.



Penny Carr, TUQ / Australia.



Kazuo Takashima, JTA / Japan.



Dr. Franz-Georg Rips, DMB / Germany.

PHOTO: JÜRGEN SCHOO, DMB

promoting tenants' rights and affordable rental housing, IUT also promotes rental housing as a social commodity as such.

IUT strongly believes that rental housing should be an important component in every democratic society. Citizens must be given the possibility to choose from a variety of tenures; rental, co-operative in several forms, and from ownership.

Figures on housing give that rental housing is decreasing in almost all countries, in many countries sometimes to unsustainable levels below five percent of the total stock. Several reasons are to be found; tax benefits and subsidies for homeowners, "right to buy" schemes with subsidies, restitution in Central and East Europe, governments adopt the idea of an asset or property based welfare system, large scale selling of municipal housing to multi national investors.

Perhaps all of these reasons can be summarized as shifts in ideology? Today, all sectors, including the social sectors, are thought to be best provided for by the Market. Twenty years ago we expected social services to derive from state and government initiatives.

Privatisation and housing exclusion

Consequence and results from privatisation vary from country to country but can often be summarised as "housing exclusion" and rental housing becoming residual. States react to globalization as a cause to withdraw from policy regulation and reduce public spending and increase economic and labour market competitiveness. Low income households and immigrants get difficulties in finding housing, and homelessness increase. Poor homeowners can often not afford maintenance and renovation. Another consequence is reduced labour mobility, due partly to high transaction costs.

IUT, being politically not affiliated to any political ideology, does not take any standpoint in the issue whether affordable rental housing should be provided for by the public or the private sector – provided that the national legal systems guarantee a fair and transparent provision of affordable housing, giving each and everyone the right to enjoy decent living.



Dr. Klaus Töpfer.

Meet the VIPs!

By Anna Eklöf, SUT/IUT

The IUT congress was attended by two guests who have a particular status on the housing arena; Dr. Klaus Töpfer and M. Alain Hutchinson, member of the European Parliament.

Dr. Klaus Töpfer is widely recognized as having spearheaded environmental policy as Minister of Environment in his home country Germany 1987–1994. With reference to housing; Dr. Töpfer was Executive Director of the UN Centre for Human Settlements 1998 to 2000. Before joining the UN Dr. Töpfer held several posts in the Federal Government of Germany. He was Federal Minister, “Housing Minister”, 1994 to 1998.

M. Alain Hutchinson is a Belgian born politician and Member of the European Parliament with the Parti Socialiste, part of the Socialist Group, and he is also on the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development. M. Hutchinson was State Secretary responsible for housing and energy in Brussels, 1999–2004. M. Hutchinson is vice president of the EU Intergroup on Housing and Urban issues.

Global Tenant: The main focus of this IUT congress is privatisation, of rental housing. What is your view in this issue? Klaus Töpfer: Of course we need private capital in the housing market. But having in mind the consequences of globalisation, the polarisation in societies, it is absolutely necessary that we also restore the respon-

sibility of governments and city governments, so that we can stabilise and integrate the more colourful society. The best protection for tenants, always, is a stable stock of socially oriented housing, and this will be even more important in the future. The next condition is that we have a very global development in the market for tenants.

Alain Hutchinson: Today, if you want people to have decent and affordable housing in all the European territory, it is very important that the public sector takes initiatives. I am afraid of those who want to stimulate housing completely through the market economy. For me, housing must be considered as a general interest and we must secure this situation. Otherwise I think that housing in Europe will be taken over completely by the private sector, and ordinary people will not find anywhere to live.

GT: Dr. Töpfer, given your experience in developing countries, what would you advise tenant organisations in the western part of the world to focus on when working with tenant organisations in developing countries?

KT: We must do whatever possible to make this co-operation very successful and efficient. Why? The population is decreasing in developed countries. So, we will have immigration in the developed countries, which in most places will be a huge task to manage. Therefore, once more, it is of highest importance that the International Union of Tenants to be faced that way, first and foremost to the developed countries.

GT: What do you think about the fact that IUT is opening an office in Brussels? **KT:** You have to be in Brussels, without any doubt. And to be in Brussels does not mean only to be working for Europe. Brussels is one of the main players around the world; therefore it is good to have an office in Brussels, to be very close with regards to harmonisation in Europe, but also to be very close as a stimulation of the European responsibility for developing countries.

AH: As a member of the European Parliament, I think it is very important that you will be able to work from inside the Parliament, inside the Commission, inside the Council, to defend your ideas. It is a good opportunity now when so many housing-NGO:s are now working in Brussels. For us, in the Parliament, it is always important to be informed; we have so many things to vote on, to read and sometimes it is great to get comments and information from NGO:s, such as IUT.

GT: Mr. Hutchinson, as a member of the European Parliament, how would you advice IUT and other NGO:s to lobby effectively?

AH: It is probably easier to lobby us while we are not in Brussels but in Strasbourg, in France, where the EU Parliament convenes one week in four. We vote every day, hundreds of different decisions are being considered and decided on and unfortunately it is impossible for any MEP to be completely up-dated on all aspects. That is why it is important for an organisation to be present in Brussels, and in Strasbourg. You will be able to contact all the MEP:s just by being in the Parliament, talking with them and with the different political groupings.



Alain Hutchinson MEP, Belgium.

The socially integrative city

Neighbourhood management in Moabit, Berlin

By Anna Eklöf SUT/IUT

Early on Sunday morning, with the sun shining in the eyes of still sleepy congress delegates, we set out for a city walk to Moabit, a city district just north of Tiergarten.

Moabit is a district completely surrounded by water, even though we are in Berlin, with some 20,000 inhabitants of which some 35 percent are from mainly Turkish and Arabic descent. This is a previous worker's district and still there are some manufacturing industries, like the gigantic power plant and turbine hall of Siemens. The buildings are mostly from the beginning of the 20th century. As a result of extensive damage from World War II, there are also many structures from the 1950s–70s. In general, there are no big housing associations, every building is owned by another landlord.

Main problems in Moabit include the absence of open space and playgrounds, traffic, and noise created by industries in the area. There is also little interaction between the different ethnic groups and conflicts occur on the street and between neighbours. The area is characterized by low income households, fairly high unemployment and children having problems at school. Two patterns can be observed amongst inhabitants of Moabit: those who move to other districts after about two years, and those who have lived in the area for more than ten years.

Creating participation, networks and trust

The social situation in Moabit made it suitable for a programme initiated in 1999 by the City of Berlin, in co-operation with the European Union and the German Federal Government – The Socially Integrative City. Creating networks between local initiatives, organizations, and businesses, and promoting their involvement in neighbourhood activities is an important factor for Moabit West.



The KulturFabrik in Moabit, Culture factory, a piece of the original urban culture life in Berlin for concerts, theatre, films, exhibitions, political debate – or just for reading the newspaper or a game of chess.

Today, over 40 projects have been realised by the inhabitants in Moabit, aiming to reinforce the participation of locals and involve them in the decision-making processes. The residents of Moabit are encouraged to become involved in local businesses, housing issues, the schools and child care etc.

All fifteen districts that are part of the neighbourhood management programme have advisory boards, consisting of local deputies that represent the inhabitants. A rule says that a majority of the deputies should not have any formal experience of political work or a

position in any previous project in the programme.

Some of the results achieved by Moabit's neighbourhood management include discussions between initiatives and organisations, for example meetings between religious groups, and networking of day-care centres and schools.

The neighbourhood management include several different components, such as a local office with local neighbourhood managers, employed by the City of Berlin, as well as a Neighbourhood Fund providing financial possibilities to realise projects.



Terry Edis, Chair of National Fed. of Tenant Management Organisations, Ltd. England

"IUT should focus on getting more people involved and participate, and have more tenant organisations to join the IUT. More members would make our voice heard better and make IUT stronger."



Pat Carr, State coordinator, Tenants Union of Queensland, Australia

"The IUT could promote itself more and expand internationally. This could be done via the website and the Global Tenant. In that way, more people in more countries should know about this great organisation!"



Jørgen Jensen, Board member, LLO, The Danish Tenant Union

"It is a good idea to open an IUT office in Brussels. We need to be represented within the EU and meet the property owners and the big investors in their own playing field."



Anna Pachtová, SON - Union of Czech Tenants, Czech Republic

"IUT should focus on the protection of tenure and tenant's rights. Privatisation is a problem all over Europe, and it mainly affects young people and the elderly. Privatisation is also negative because it makes it more difficult to swap flats and move across borders and within countries!"



Irenè Buche, ASLOCA, Assoc. Suisse des Locataires-Federation Romande, Switzerland

"When I see what great job we do in Eastern Europe, I think that we should be able to do the same in Africa. IUT is an international organisation, and it's focus should be wider than the borders of Europe."



Marianne Fagberg, Swedish Union of Tenants, Chief Region West, Göteborg

"An office in Brussels – finally! I think it is very good, and very important to be present where the decisions are being made. Even though housing is not clearly expressed, it is influenced by EU decisions never the less."

More from the IUT congress:

IUT's voice in Brussels in 2008

IUT's possibilities to influence the decision making processes within the EU Commission and Parliament will increase considerably from January



Ms Barbara Litke, Germany.

2008 when IUT opens its office in the capital of Europe. Ms Barbara Litke, from the German Tenant organisation, will be responsible for the office in Rue du Luxembourg 23, just minutes away from the European Parliament.

A few years ago IUT members in Europe were convinced that housing

was not going to be on the agenda of the EU, according to the principle of subsidiarity. But, we were wrong.

The mostly well functioning and liked social and public housing system in Europe is under threat, mainly from decisions taken on state aid and EU rules on competition.

Current important issues at stake are; an EU definition on social housing, how will EU directives effect housing, privatisations of municipal housing, rising energy costs in Europe and also of course IUT's call for the right to decent and affordable housing, for all.

IUT and the Aussies



Tenants Union in Queensland, TUQ, will become the IUT Focal Point for Australia from 2008.

Penny Carr, state coordinator and chief executive of TUQ, announced at the IUT congress that TUQ will represent the Australian National Association of Tenant Organisations, NATO, in the IUT and become the news line between the IUT Secretariat in Stockholm and Australia. Penny and TUQ will regularly send reports from the Australian continent to Stockholm, and propose joint actions and activities. Penny can be reached by e-mail: coordinator@tuq.org.au

Parents debts

make Miami homeless

Text: Eva-Maria Fasth Photo: Georges Cabrera

Switzerland is number one when it comes to rental housing. All the same, it is almost impossible for Miami Themo to find housing in Geneva.

– The reason is because my parents are in rent arrears.



Switzerland is well known for at least three things; its watches, cheese with big holes, and banks. And rental housing one could add! But this is nothing that the tourist brochures inform you about.

The fact is that two out of three Swiss live in rental housing, and actually 85 per cent of the people in Geneva are tenants.

How can it be so?

– It is very expensive to buy a flat here. It not a good deal, says Miami Themo who is 30 years old and lives as a tenant in Geneva, but with his roots in Congo-Kinshasa.

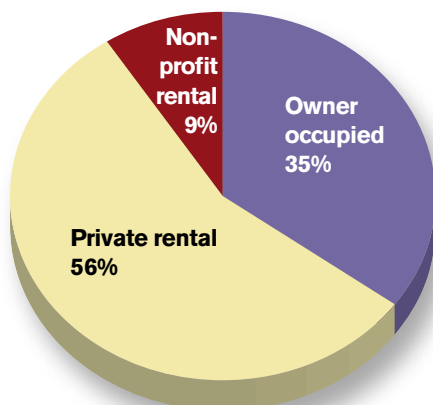
I meet 30 year old Miami in the waiting room of ASLOCA, the tenant association for the French speaking part of Switzerland. Yes, there are separate tenant associations for each official language in Switzerland; one French, one German and one Italian organisation. ASLOCA is not what you would usually refer to as an NGO, merely an office where members can have legal advice for a lower price compared to what they would have to pay at any lawyer's office. But, ASLOCA Geneva is also sort of political, as they do lobby work and launches referendums against new proposals for laws which could have effects on tenants.

Miami visits ASLOCA because his parents are about to be evicted, due to rent arrears. They live in social housing. His family's debts also



Miami Themo, one of many renters in Geneva who has difficulties finding permanent housing.

Dwellings by households, Switzerland 2000



affect his own situation and possibility to find a flat. With access to the city authority's data base the landlord can get information about his parent's financial situation, and possible debts – and this way also Miami is affected. He now hopes that the lawyers at ASLOCA should be able to assist him in appealing against his families' debts.

Housing with conditions

Miami's dream is to become acknowledged as an actor, to do Shakespeare or to act in a film, like his favourite actor

Denzel Washington. But so far he manages to get along doing casual jobs.

Miami and his Polish wife Martha now live in a big rental complex, owned by a foundation whose statutes say that the house is primarily for single women.

– Landlords in Switzerland are very strict. Martha, who teaches music at an elementary school, would probably herself pass the eye of the landlord's needle. But I would never be accepted, says Miami, and also being African does not really help. It does not matter that I have lived in Switzerland since I was six, and speak fluent French.

Miami's and Martha's two room flat is airy and bright. African drums and string instruments are decorative artefacts on the parquet floor. The sofa is draped in African cloth and small prints hang on the white walls.

Appliances such as the fridge, freezer and cooker are not normally part of the flat when you move in. These items have to be brought in by the new tenant.

The rent, exclusive heating, electricity and hot water, is 620 Euro a month. Miami does not think that they will be able to find a similar nice flat with such low rent.



Geneva by Lac Léman. PHOTO: IUT

– No, I figure that for a comparable flat we must be prepared to pay almost the double, about 1,200 Euro, says Miami.

Without good connections – no housing

Switzerland is number one when it comes to the percentage of rental housing, but probably also number one when it comes to rents! Figures show that an average Swiss pays 40 percent of his or her income for rent.

About ten percent of the rental flats in Geneva are social flats. The rents are established each year by a state commission. The households' incomes are scrutinized yearly and the number of persons living in the flat must not be less than the number of rooms.

The other 90 percent of the tenants pay market rents, which can be 1,400 Euro for a three room flat. Rents and term of lease are negotiated directly between the tenant and the landlord, each year.

Rent tribunals

Some cantons (regions), of which there are 26 in Switzerland, offer the possibility



François Zutter, lawyer at ASLOCA Geneva.

to have unreasonable rent increases and other rental disputes processed and tried in a rent tribunal, a court of arbitration.

– The share of available rental flats in Geneva is 0,0 percent, and very little is

being constructed. So, if you need a flat today there is no option but to buy one, for a lot of money, or to have the right connections, says François Zutter, lawyer at ASLOCA, the tenant association in Geneva.

– The situation for tenants is generally quite difficult, says François. The security of tenure is weak, almost non-existent. If a landlord wishes to give a tenant a notice to quit, he can always do it when the contract period expires. Tenants can appeal to the rent tribunal, but the chances to win such a case are quite small.

So, how come that the share of rental flats is so high in Switzerland?

– Well, by looking at the map everyone can see that land is limited in Switzerland. The Alps and the hilly landscape, together with plenty of pastures and strict environmental laws, make space for new construction scarce, and land expensive. So, very few can afford to buy, and to rent is the only reality for most Swiss.

UGANDA:**UNTU President Ephraim Burituuza retires, at 70**

The president and founding member of Uganda National Tenant's Union has retired

from the organization he founded 20 years ago. The organisation originally only covered the capital city of Kampala but later became a union when other tenant societies later joined with Mr Burituuza. Mr. Buriituuza will always be remembered for his hard work and will stay with UNTU as a consultant. Mr Neriah Rugarama, also one of the founding members, has succeeded Mr Buriituuza as President of UNTU.

Source: UNTU

AUSTRALIA, QUEENSLAND:**Demanding civilised rights for tenants**

The government in the state of Queensland is calling for public submission on

the Residential Tenancies Act Review paper. The Tenants Union of Queensland, TUQ, demands a fair go, and basic standard rights for tenants, such as reasons for being evicted. Today, no reason is necessary! Also tenants need the ability to challenge rent increases and also a specialised Tribunal to hear disputes.

32 percent of the households in Queensland rent, of which 81 percent from private lessors. Average length of tenancy is only 11,5 months.

Source: United Times, newsletter of TUQ

FRANCE:**Right to Housing – not yet**

The European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless,

FEANTSA, is using a collective complaints mechanism of the European Social Charter to highlight France's responsibility for the failure to ensure the effective exercise of the right to housing, as defined in article 31 of the Social Charter, of the

Council of Europe. A first hearing took place, France vs. FEANTSA, on September 17 in Strasbourg, which resulted in an Ok from the Committee of Social Rights to bring the case onwards, to the Council of Ministers and to the Parliamentary Assembly for a decision.

Source: FEANTSA

SCOTLAND:**Right to housing – from 2012**

The right to housing in Scotland will become a constitutional right from 2012. Every unintentionally homeless person will have the right to a permanent home. Even intentionally homeless will be entitled to a short-term tenancy.

Source: Roof magazine, U.K.

ENGLAND:**KFTRA 1987–2007**

The KIRKLEES Fed. Of Tenants & Residents Association is celebrating 20 years of campaigning for Tenants' Rights. Kirklees, situated north of Manchester, suffered greatly in the 1970's and 80's when large employers such as the woollen mills closed town. The Federation was set up as a reaction to government legislation and attacks on the social provision of decent affordable rented housing.

IUT congratulates!

USA, NEW ORLEANS**Low income renters have been ignored**

Prior to the hurricane Katrina in 2005 over half, 53 percent, of the households in New Orleans were renters, compared to 32 per cent nationally. But while 40 percent of Louisianians who lost their homes were renters, only 15 per cent of the recovery funds have been designated for restoring rental homes. Low income renters have been virtually ignored in the recovery efforts.

Source: Shelterforce magazine

GEORGIA:**UN reports on poor maintenance and dangerous lifts**

When the local communist government left Tbilisi in 1991, and Georgia became independent, all multifamily housing was owned by the state. By 1999 the level of privatized housing in Tbilisi was 87 per cent and in 2004 the share was almost 95 per cent. New owners of property appeared overnight without the requisite experience and resources to fulfil the obligations of property owners. No public guidelines were available. One example; approx. 80 per cent of the 6,000 lifts in Tbilisi require urgent renovation.

Source: Country Profile on Georgia, UN ECE

NORWAY:**Kafka, but with a happy end**

The Tenants organisation in Oslo has sponsored a documentary film about Sven Ekholm's year-long struggle against the demolition of his tenement house in Oslo.

It is a film about speculation, red tape and one man's fight against the world, which in this case is the municipal housing company, OBOS. The company bought the historical house from a speculator and then promised to renovate – which never happened. A film that affects, but with a happy ending.

Source: Lbf, the Tenant's organisation in Oslo

SPAIN, CATALONIA:**160,000 new social housing units**

In November several stakeholders signed the National Pact for housing in Barcelona which includes the construction of 160,000 social housing units; 60 per cent for owner occupation and 40 per cent for rent. The Pact also included renovation of 300,000 flats. Also mentioned in the Pact was the possibility to expropriate of the usufruct of empty dwellings for social rental.

Source: FEANTSA Flash