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THEME:

Tenant
participation
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Mieterbeteiligung
Participation
des locataires
Partecipazione
degli inquilini



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Tenant Participation in Scotland, moving on

I have the best job in Scotland! Working with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Scotland means I go to the most beautiful parts of Scotland, meet amazing people – and get paid for it!

Scotland has a long history of tenant participation and tenants taking action to improve their housing conditions and services. TPAS Scotland has been supporting tenants for many years to develop good working relationships with their landlords to work in partnership to improve housing.

Over the past 18 months TPAS Scotland has been working with the Scottish Government on a plan to develop a Tenants Charter for Housing in Scotland. The TPAS team toured Scotland, mostly concentrating on the rural, remote and island communities, asking Tenants for example – what they thought a good landlord should be doing, what services should be provided and how tenants should be involved in decision making. The Charter will become the measure for regulating local authority and housing association landlords in Scotland, it has truly been developed by tenants – tenants have been at the heart of the process.

Since Housing has become the responsibility of the

Scottish Parliament and decisions about Housing are taken in Scotland, it seems our Parliament is a listening and doing Parliament. And we finally have a Government who actively hear the tenants, and who actively seek tenants' views.

Tenants across Scotland have formed regional networks. These networks are supported by the Government and give tenants a direct relationship with the Parliament – a direct link to decision making at the highest level. We are proud in Scotland of the opportunities for tenants to influence the most powerful people but are also aware that we must nurture local communities, streets and villages that are outside these networks, to ensure their quiet voices are taken into account.

Scotland calls itself the best small country in the world and in terms of involving tenants it's doing quite well so far!

Lesley Baird, Chief Executive of TPAS Scotland



CALENDAR 2012

April 10–12: Housing California Annual Conference, in Sacramento

April 21–22: Contemporary Housing Issues in a Changing Europe, Galway Ireland

April 25–26: Annual Swedish national housing meeting, in Gävle

May 5: Congress of Finnish Tenants, Vuokralaiset ry, Helsinki

June 11–15: 2012 World Indigenous Housing Conference, Vancouver Canada

June 12–14: CIH Annual Conference and Exhibition, Manchester England

June 15–17: National Conference of the Swedish Union of Tenants, Stockholm

June 24–26: NAHT Annual Conference, Washington D.C.

June 24–27: ENHR Conference 2012 in Lillehammer, Norway

July 16–18: TPAS England Annual Conference, Birmingham

August 1–4: Housing in Latin America, Buenos Aires Argentina

September 1–7: World Urban Forum, Naples Italy

September 16–19: SAHF conference in Cape Town, South Africa

September 24–26: 73rd UN ECE Session of the Com. on Housing and Land Management, Geneva

October 1: International Tenants Day

October 26–28: TPAS Scotland Annual Conference, Crieff Scotland

October 30–Nov. 2: 7:th National Australian Housing conference, in Brisbane

November 3–4: Congress of LLO, Danish Tenant Organisation

For more information on conferences: www.iut.nu/conferences.htm

Tenant engagement across Europe

English landlords can learn from best practice in Denmark, where tenancies last for an average of seven years. What can English social landlords learn from their contemporaries in Denmark?

Resident engagement is a big issue for the top social landlords in England and across Europe. The Hyde Group asked Heriot-Watt University and the Housing Quality Network to learn from best practice at other large landlords across Europe. What was remarkable was that all of the landlords we spoke to wanted residents to have a bigger say in their work. They believed this was the best way to drive the business forward and stay true to their values.

Tenants are in a great position to spot waste. In Holland and Denmark, residents participated in decisions about expansion. Generally they were pro-growth, as it spread risk. In England tenants help make the case for others to transfer over or merge with their landlord.

Across Europe simple engagement techniques were found to work best. Regular face-to-face contact with tenants paid dividends everywhere. Tenants stay involved if they know they are making a difference. The lesson is to make sure that costs have shrunk and that leap in satisfaction is down to them. Of course it's not all plain sailing. In Denmark, tenants wanted a crack down on badly behaved neighbours. This was a wake up call to the staff who had taken a hands-off libertarian stance in the past.

Older white men dominate involvement everywhere, and they are valued, but we need to reach out to everyone. Fun days and special projects to appeal to the young proved a helpful tool across Europe. There were also helpful hints from our European contemporaries for the challenges ahead in England. Seven years is the average length of a tenancy in Denmark – it's become a stepping stone to home ownership. Landlords there run shorter, sharper top and tail consultations.

All the landlords we looked at had strong track records in resident engagement, but on gov-



PHOTO: MAGNUS HAMMAR/JUT

The Danish housing policy for public housing has a long tradition of self-government and tenant participation, which is governed by the Law on Tenants' Democracy from 1984. Tenants in public housing associations elect their own board, which is responsible for finances and daily operations of the properties. The annual general meeting is the decision-making body, where each household generally has two votes.

ernance there were big differences. In Denmark, tenants were in the majority on boards. Tenants also sit on boards in Holland – but you cannot be on the board of your own landlord. That's seen as a conflict of interest.

Yet much more unites than divides landlords across Europe. The big gulf lies closer to home: education, health and care face endless inspection and intervention; we don't. In England there is always the threat of a return to centralisation. How can we counter that? Dutch landlords might have the answer. They run their own system to check that all members run services for tenants that are up to scratch, and the Dutch government trusts them.

One reason Hyde commissioned the research was the regulator no longer has a role in defining best practice when it comes to engaging our residents. The housing association invested some money so all landlords could learn.

Maybe we need to go further and take more of the law into our own hands. Should English landlords run their own tough peer reviews to check standards? It looks like the logical next step. If we got this right there would be less of a role for the state and more say for all local residents.

Text Alistair McIntosh, chief executive of the Housing Quality Network
Reprinted by permission from the Guardian

More than a sausage sizzle:

Striving for Tenant Participation in New South Wales, Australia

The value of tenant participation is often held up as a self-evident truth, its practice an inalienable right for social housing tenants and easy to implement. This is, on paper, no less true in New South Wales (NSW) than anywhere else.

Consider a private tenant asserting that they should have a role in their landlord's decision-making process about setting the rent, or whether the landlord should sell the premises. The situation is similar in social housing. The tension between the conceptualisation of an organisation as, legally, a landlord and at the same time the provider a most cost-effective societal safety nets, leads to the disconnect between the rhetoric of tenant participation and its reality.

There are two arms to tenant participation: The benefits to the tenants themselves and the benefits to the provider. Given the purpose of social housing is the benefit to the tenants, let's start there.

Living in social housing, with its bureaucracy, inscrutable policy and overworked housing officers can be tiresome and disheartening. Returning the sense of control that tenants have over their housing can develop skills and grow confidence and trust in people who have often struggled to do so. This also reflects a fundamental principle of

social justice – involving those most affected by a decision in the decision.

Whilst none of the different models of social housing have participation as a legal requirement, there are different models that feature participation more or less heavily as a part of their fundamental structure.

Although we discuss only public housing and community housing in this article, it is important to note that there are other forms of social housing in which effective tenant



participation is a fundamental and well-preserved feature. Most notably are perhaps the Aboriginal Land Councils and the growing housing co-operatives which both operate as social housing providers.

Public and community housing makes up over 90 per cent of the social housing provided in New South Wales. Housing NSW, the government housing provider, identifies the following desired outcomes from its Tenant Participation Resource Service policy; *"Tenants are engaged in communities and have their needs and priorities identified and considered in planning and service delivery. Tenants are informed about their rights and responsibilities and are supported with their housing needs. Furthermore, tenants have skills and resources to participate in commu-*

nity life and receive services that are coordinated, flexible and responsive to their needs."

Very little research is done regarding how tenant participation is implemented in NSW. We can only share some insights based on our own workers experience and those our client tenants have shared. This may not reflect the full range of experiences.

We find there are some fundamental flaws with the system of participation currently in effect. Chiefly, the necessary time and preparation is often overlooked as more immediate organisational pressures take priority. It is far quicker for a provider to make a decision "in house" at a policy meeting, than to organise meetings. Too often, these meetings when they do happen are in form of "information sessions" rather than a true forum for debate.

Tenant representatives on community housing boards are a common feature, however some representatives find their presence is a token gesture. Important decisions are often made without their meaningful input, even while they are seated at the same table.

Text Leo Patterson Ross,
BSW, Legal Support Officer,
Tenants Union of
New South Wales, Australia





TRAC and other Canadian NGOs called for housing and tenants' rights at WUF III in Vancouver.

Concept of Tenant Participation in Canada

The concept of tenant participation in Canada can be viewed from a number of angles. From an organizational standpoint, TRAC's overall direction is guided by feedback we receive through our Tenant Infoline, public legal education workshops, advocate training sessions, and other services.

We identify trends and patterns and relay these findings to government and other stakeholders in the hopes of influencing legislative and policy changes. In other words, the tenants with whom we interact on a daily basis collectively participate in shaping our agenda and informing our recommendations.

Bed bugs have become epidemic in Canada and perhaps one of the best current examples of tenant participation is the online bed bug registry where visitors can post updates on the status of buildings in their area. The

registry functions as a conduit through which tenants can share relevant information and expose negligent landlords. As it continues to gain popularity, we are hopeful that more and more tenants will check the site as a precaution before signing agreements and, consequently, an increasing number of landlords will be deterred from allowing bugs to infest their properties.

Unfortunately, tenant participation in British Columbia is still lacking. Recently the City of North Vancouver Civic Engagement Task Force released a report urging the City to reach out to tenants during the municipal election and public consultation processes.

Municipal decision-making impacts things like standards of maintenance bylaws, secondary suite bylaws and rezoning applications. And yet, in general, tenants still don't feel as compelled as homeowners to inform themselves about the issues, vote, or otherwise participate. Some BC-based researchers – Kennedy Stewart, Stuart Young and Noreen Ver-

berg, to name a few – have conducted studies that show how voter turnout, voter knowledge and/or voting behaviour is more positively correlated to homeowners than renters.

Each Province's tenancy laws differ in how they allow for tenant participation. One aspect of the Ontario legislation that encourages participation is the right to form tenants' associations. While BC's Residential Tenancy Act ensures that tenants have a right to quiet enjoyment, freedom from unreasonable interference from their landlord, and the right to have guests under reasonable circumstances, the Ontario legislation takes it one step further by explicitly making it an offence for a landlord to knowingly harass, hinder, obstruct or interfere with a tenant attempting to participate in or organize a tenants' association.

According to Geordie Dent, Executive Director of the Federation of Metro Tenants' Association (FMTA) in Toronto, Ontario, this could be one of the reasons why Ontario tenants are more likely than BC tenants to form collectives when addressing tenancy problems. Based on his experiences at FMTA, affiliated associations are generally better able to organize community events, tackle maintenance issues, pressure their landlord to install security systems, and otherwise deal with tenancy disputes.

Renters at Risk is a grassroots group of concerned BC citizens who fight back against large corporate landlords and generally promote tenants' rights. In recent years, some BC landlords have tried evicting large numbers of tenants in order to complete minor renovations and then re-rent their suites at higher prices. These types of mass "reno-victions" represent one of Vancouver's most controversial housing issues. Since forming, Renters at Risk has successfully fought off illegal renovations and continue to lobby for legislative amendments such as the right of first refusal. They stand as a positive example of how tenants can assemble and participate in protecting their right to affordable rental housing and security of tenure.



Text Andrew Sakamoto,
Executive Director,
TRAC Tenant Resource &
Advisory Centre



Once a year, the supervisory board and the Management Tenants Council "Unternehmensmieterrat" visits the renovation projects of the "Wohnbau Gießen GmbH".

German tenants:

Debate ok, but no decision making!

Unlike in the working environment in Germany, there exists no law regarding co-determination in residential housing and thus no enforceable right for tenants to be involved in key planning decisions of the landlords. By national legislation, there is nothing mentioned about 'tenant participation'.

However, a number of good examples from local practices exist. In Berlin, there are tenant representatives in almost all housing associations, dating back to a directive from the Berlin senate in 1983. Tenant councils are elected by the residents of a residential complex and represent their interests towards the landlords.

The German Tenant Association, Deutscher Mieterbund (DMB) has argued for an increase of opportunities for tenant participation. Tenant advisory committees are important because they exercise the rights which would not be noticed otherwise. The very existence of advisory committees can lead to more and better management of the houses.

Tenant advisory committees do not replace the involvement of those concerned in the governing bodies of the housing associations. In general, tenants are often missing on supervisory boards. The tenant's power is

therefore rather weak, and usually they are not granted more than a limited degree of consultation and proposal rights – an attitude that can be summarized as: 'Join the conversation – yes please! Participate in decision making – no thanks!' Furthermore, the opportunities for participation of the tenant advisory committees are limited to the national's housing companies.

With regards to the private sector, private landlords do not need to worry about a democratically elected tenants' council – they simply do not exist.

"Wohnbau Gießen", a municipal housing company in the town of Gießen, is practicing a consistent model of tenant participation since 1992, which is built from the bottom up. The tenants choose so-called district councils' representatives who have rights to participate in the planning of construction operations. Furthermore, these representatives chose an "Unternehmensmieterrat", a management tenant council, which has influence on the decisions regarding the management of maintenance and modernization. Finally, two tenants are represented on the supervisory board. The experiences are, according to the Wohnbau Gießen, quite positive.

In terms of costs, it pays off for the municipal housing companies to incorporate tenants in the management of the houses. Tenant par-

ticipation is also useful for new buildings, when the new tenants can themselves decide on how they want to make the best use of the floor area, and whether they want to contribute with their own labour, as to cut costs.

Numerous projects of modernization of old buildings have shown that participation not only brings savings for the tenants, but is also profitable for the landlord. The tenants can decide what kind of kitchen or bathroom goods they want to have – which will have an impact on the rent of course. Additionally, tenants can decide themselves whether they wanted to provide craft services or getting financially involved.

It is obvious that participation in the housing environment is increasing. Especially in problematic areas tenant participation can make a valuable contribution to the housing policy. But, still the majority of the housing companies see such involvement of the tenants with some skepticism.

More democratic rights for tenants are more necessary now than ever before.

Text Heike Zuhse, Deutscher Mieterbund e. V.
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Sweden, where tenants negotiate their own rents

Tenants in Sweden have a great deal of influence over their living arrangements. Perhaps the most striking feature of Swedish tenant participation is that rents are set, in the public as well as in the private sector, by yearly negotiations between the tenant's representatives from the Swedish Union of Tenants and the representatives of the landlords.

Besides having influence on the annual rent increases throughout the rental sector, tenant participation is carried out through agreements between local branches of the Swedish Union of Tenants, SUT, and the 310 Swedish public housing companies.

Through these agreements the housing companies allocate funding to the local tenant associations, for them to arrange meetings with the residents. These meetings allow consultations between the housing company and their tenants on future plans for matters such as renovation, reconstructions and up grading of flats and common spaces, and the outer area. Also, management of laundry-rooms, of playgrounds and of recycling stations is discussed, together with issues concerning neighbourhood safety.

Up till 2010 these consultations were voluntary, but since 2011 there is new legislation which stipulates that public housing companies must offer its tenants a certain degree of participation.

A good example of tenant participation à la Sweden is from the extensive renovation of the housing estate Brogården in Alingsås. The houses are all from the so called 'million homes programme' when a million homes were built in Sweden 1965 to 1975.

The houses at Brogården were in desperate need of repairs and the municipal housing company decided to go for a total makeover, starting in 2008. The makeover includes energy efficiency refurbishment with retro fitting of windows, insulation and new plumbing, using passive house



Newly refurbished municipal housing at Brogården.

techniques. Moreover, all tenants have to be evacuated for six months. These are measures that usually stir up anxiety and cause many questions among the residents. The housing company chose to start a dialogue with the residents long before the start of the renovation. Brogården consists of traditionally, from that time, Swedish 3-floor panel houses, with all in all 299 flats.

The 16 houses are renovated one after another, and an evaluation is carried out among the tenants after completion of each house to learn from successful solutions, and from possible mistakes. The whole project is planned to be finished by 2013. News about the project is regularly posted in a newsletter jointly distributed to all households by the housing company Alingsåshem and Swed-

ish Union of Tenants. Furthermore, Alingsåshem has set up an information office at the estate with a hired person from the tenants union to be around for answering questions. A reference group consisting of people from the housing company, the entrepreneur Skanska and the tenants' union make sure that all information about the project is available to all the residents. This way the residents are given the same information from the three sides, whoever they speak with.

Text Silla Odhnoff,
Swedish Union of Tenants.
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PHOTO: CADWYN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Resident participation in England – a roller coaster ride

In England tenant participation really means tenant empowerment, tenants having a meaningful input into the management of their homes.

TPAS Tenant Participation Advisory Service, England has been working to promote resident empowerment for the

As we head into a new era of “self-regulation” the ups and downs continue.

past 24 years and the English tenant movement can trace its roots back over 50 years. TPAS now represents over 1,800 tenant and resident organisations and over 240 landlord members who must commit to working in partnership with tenants. Even though we have reached a point where there is greater tenant empowerment than ever before it has been a roller-coaster ride. As we head into a new era of “self-regulation” the ups and downs continue.



Residents of Jubilee Gardens in Heath, Cardiff in Wales, have set up their own group to work together to help improve their local environment. Among several awards, the group have been awarded the Improving the Environment Award at the 2010 TPAS Cymru Awards. They carry out regular estate litter picks, green-themed craft activities for children, planting sessions and are creating a wildflower garden in an unused communal green space.

The English tenant movement started out small with tenants associations representing tenants in a local area. Some joined together to make Federations with a stronger voice. The influence that tenants could exert over their landlords increased, especially for tenants of Local Authorities with the introduction of a right to be consulted in 1990 and the requirement to establish a Tenants Compact in 1995.

Although the theory was sound in reality the approach was inconsistent and did not give tenants with any enforceable right to influence decisions. For Housing Association there was an expectation that tenants would be involved and that some board members will be tenants.

Throughout the next two decades whilst many tenants campaigned to be allowed to influence and nego-

tiate with their landlord there was no meaningful regulation in place to help that process. Although there were great examples of landlords working in partnership with their tenants these were exceptions rather than the rule. Tenants needed legislation to ensure real empowerment in the management of their homes.

The Tenants Services Authority, TSA, was launched in 2008 as the new regulator for nearly 1,800 social housing landlords, including housing associations, councils and co-operatives in England. There was cautious excitement from tenants, not least because the regulator finally had the word “tenant” as part of its title.

The National Tenants Voice, NTV, established in February 2010, is a body with a Council of 50 tenants and a Board of 15. This Voice was strongly supported by the National Tenants Organisations. For the first time a substantial budget, £1.25 million, was allocated to support these functions.

The TSA published its regulatory framework for social housing, with six standards that describe the outcomes landlords should meet and the TSA expectations as regulator. It seemed many of those principles for which TPAS and others had so long fought for would at last be protected by legislation.

But the situation changed quickly. By October 2010 the new Coalition Government’s Minister for Housing had announced the abolition of the TSA and the end of funding for the NTV. The Homes and Communities Agency was appointed the new regulator and will not now proactively monitor compliance with consumer (tenant) regulation standards and if tenants consider these are not being reached they must take this up through other means.

Are the dreams of co-regulation, where tenants agree standards and objectives with their landlord now deemed to be forgotten? Will landlords now be allowed to forget the need to work in partnership with tenants because of a new soft approach to regulation?

We are determined to ensure that this does not happen. TPAS has worked with the other national tenant organisations, and with a range of tenants and landlords, to prove that tenant empowerment is not just the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do. We promote the business case for the positive impact that can be achieved by good tenant led scrutiny and by tenants constructively holding their landlords to account.

The English tenant’s voice will continue to be strong but there is much work needed to ensure that it is heard and responded to by policy makers. The rollercoaster ride continues.

Tenant cashback

Housing minister Shapps has launched an initiative which allows social tenants to be paid for carrying out small repairs in their homes. Tenants who do repairs can claim up to £500 a year from their landlord. The scheme also includes basic training for those who lack the skills.

Power to the Tenants

TPAS England together with Tenants’ and Residents’ Organisation of England, TAROE, have during the past seven months run 102 ‘growing-together’ courses. The courses are part of a national tenant training programme where tenants learn how new co-regulation legislation could mean that tenants have more powers than ever to scrutinise housing providers.



Text Richard Hewgill, board member of TPAS England. rhewgill@tiscali.co.uk. www.tpas.org.uk

Tenant participation in France;

A legal frame which needs mending

In France, tenant participation in the social housing sector has been improved step by step since the 1980's. Various provisions exist to make tenants or their representative associations participate in the local and national housing policies.



At the local level, thanks to elections in the social housing sector, the tenants have since 1947 been able to vote every four years, for their representatives at boards of the social housing companies. Most of the candidates belong to national tenant unions, of which there are three major ones in France. The Confédération Nationale du Logement, CNL, with almost 800 representatives, is the major national representative tenant union.

Like any other members of board of the social housing company, the tenant representatives can have their saying on management issues. Thanks to their deliberative vote, they also play an active role in the debate on rent increases, and budgets are voted on by the tenants.

These elections determine the representativeness of a tenant association, locally and nationally, making it an inescapable interlocutor for the social landlords and housing authorities.

The **Solidarity and Urban Renewal Act** was introduced in the year 2000, and calls for the obligation for every French town of more than 3,500 inhabitants to have a minimum of 20 per cent social housing of its total stock. The Act also made it compulsory to establish joint plans between social landlords and the tenant unions being represented in its housing stock. The aim was to create a “rental dialogue Council”, where the two parties discuss action plans for housing and the veritable means that must be given for the dialogue.

In case of refurbishments that might result in rent increases or increases of services charges, the landlords must consult



PHOTO: MAGNUS HAMMAR/JUT

All French municipalities, towns and also boroughs in Paris, arrondissements, with more than 3,500 inhabitants have the obligation by law to have a minimum of 20 per cent social housing of its total stock. Also in Trocadéro, in the 16th arrondissement which is one of the most affluent parts of Paris, the municipality is buying up property and leases out the flats to low income households. But some rich municipalities, like Neuilly-sur-Seine where President Nicolas Sarkozy was once the Mayor, with only a few per cent of social housing, prefer to pay the fines.

the representatives of the tenant unions and enter into a so called “local rental collective agreement”. Tenant unions can negotiate and if the project is refused by more than 50

per cent of the tenants, it cannot be realized.

On the national level, the French tenant movement has a say through two main provi-

Tenant participation, the Italian way

sions; the National Concertation Commission (CNC) and the National Housing Council (CNH).

The CNC is directed from the Ministry for Housing and gathers nationwide landlord and tenant union representatives. Through studies, proposals and notices, CNC's general mission is to improve relationships between landlords and tenants. The CNH expresses opinions about any aspect of the national housing policy for the attention of the Housing Minister. It gathers all the actors taking an active part in housing issues, including CNL.

It all sounds nice in theory, but reality is a bit different. During the last tenant elections in 2010, even though more than 4 million households were concerned in the social housing sector, there were almost no national campaigning and advertising in media financed by public authorities. Locally the landlords did the legal minimum! But the tenant-board member statuses are not harmonized. The tenants have only a deliberative position or a simple consultative vote. Moreover, a tenant must not have rent arrears to run for the social housing elections, whereas for political elections, a candidate is not asked to be "clean" about e.g. possible income taxes arrears.

Tenant participation standards in France could be improved and strengthened. CNL lobbies for improved conditions for tenant representatives as it has become more difficult to combine tenant representation work with normal working hours. CNL's proposal is to establish a true legal status for tenant representatives, following the example of the status of trade union representatives, who can take hours off from their regular work to do union related work, in order to participate efficiently and with skills. There is also need for theoretical and technical training on all house related issues – something which is missing today.

Text Stéphanie Sotison, for Confédération Nationale du Logement, CNL.

Italy is one of the countries in Europe with the lowest levels of rental housing, around 20 per cent of total stock, of which only 5 per cent are social public rentals.

The Italian rent law does not provide the opportunity for tenants to take a direct and active role in the decision making processes, including discussion of rent policies. Nevertheless, Italian tenants are represented by six national tenant unions, of which only three play more important roles; SUNIA, UNIAT and SICET. Furthermore, the tenant unions are each affiliated to one of the major labour unions in Italy.

The private rental sector is regulated by the Housing Act. The Act lays down that when establishing guidelines for the rent setting, tenant unions, together with the federation of property owners, have the task of reaching a national agreement every four years.

Tenants in the private stock have the possibilities to participate through general assemblies where they can discuss and have a say in e.g. period of heating season, and issues on parking and gardening.

Tenants in public housing are often organised in committees, consisting of 10–20 tenants, at the house level. The tenants have a possibility of direct self-management of costs derived from heating, electricity, water, etc. Also committee members collect, from the tenants, the committee's agreed fees for heating costs, cleaning and perhaps for gardening. The chair of the committee then pays the fees to the service company. Issues concerning maintenance are always decided on by the public agencies.

Public commissions examine the applications from prospective new tenants for social housing. Rules are strict, and income ceilings vary in Italy from € 13,000 to € 21,000 per year and household.

Social poverty is widening in Italy, according to statistics from the Bank of Italy, and the gap is most evident from a tenant's perspective. Considering rent or a mortgage of more than 30 per cent of income as a measure of severe economic hardship, it may be concluded that 31 per cent of Italian households who live in a rented accommodations are in difficulties, whereas only 3 per cent of the families who have a mortgage are affected.

Rental housing in Italy is decided on at different institutions, at different levels. The State deals with the laws that regulate the private rental sector, including rents. Subsidised public rental housing, throughout the 20 regions and over 8,000 municipalities, is financed by the national government. The regions make the laws that govern public rents, incl. criteria for being eligible for public housing, while the municipalities stipulate levels of income etc. for being eligible for rent allowances.

Tenant participation should be improved by strengthening the power and competence of the labour union representatives. In particular, SICET considers that joint mediation, rent tribunals, should be facilitated, which would make court interventions unnecessary in most cases.

SICET would also like to see established a bilateral, a new institution body made up of managers of public housing companies and representatives of labour unions to deal with subsidies for tenants, with service charges, with maintenance and with retrofitting and improving energy efficiency in buildings.



Text Massimo Petterlin, SICET, massimo.petterlin@cisl.it



PHOTO: MAGNUS HAMMAR/UT

Tenants at the Ship Kip Mei Estate, Mei Ho House, Hong Kong.

No real tenant power in Hong Kong

Since the 1950s, the Hong Kong government has been providing subsidized public rental housing to help solve the housing problems of the low income groups. Tenant participation in Hong Kong is carried out through Estate Management Advisory Committees, EMACs.

About 30 per cent, or almost 2 million, of Hong Kong's 7.1 million people are accommodated in public rental housing units built mainly by the

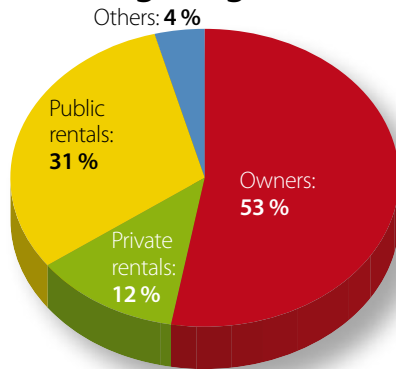
The Committees shall reflect tenants' views on estate management matters, including maintenance and improvement works.

Hong Kong Housing Authority, HKHA.

Following a successful trial run in eight estates in 1995, EMACs are now set up in all HKHA's 139 public rental housing estates. The establishment of EMACs is regarded as a response to increasing demand for transparency in local estate offices and the move of using private contractors in the provision of cleaning, maintenance and security services within housing estates.

EMACs are chaired, not by tenants, but by Estate Housing Managers, who are government offi-

Tenure in Hong Kong, 2011



Source: Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (2011)

cials. Members of EMACs include representatives from Mutual Aid Committees, MACs, which are voluntary bodies formed by the residents of a building. Furthermore, EMACs include a representative from HKHA's commercial tenants' association and elected District Council Member(s). All members are appointed for a two-year term. EMACs meet usually every second month, and advise the Housing Manager on maintenance and improvement works within the estate, proposals relating to security, orderliness and cleanliness, and control over roads and car parks.

Moreover, the Committees deal with awards and renewals of services contracts and the drawing up of estate management and maintenance action plans. The Committees shall reflect tenants' views on estate management matters, including maintenance and improvement works.

EMACs are also involved in appraising the performance of contractors who provide services on the estate, and can propose estate community activities.

From the above list of responsibilities, we can understand that EMACs remain consultative bodies and there is no real transfer of power. The Housing Manager will retain an overall control of the management of the estate, such as enforcing tenancy conditions and regulating the estate environment, etc. Territory-wide housing policies such as those concerning rents, increase in fees and charges, etc. continue to rest with the Hong Kong Housing Authority.

Funding is provided at a current amount of HK\$80,000/year (~€8,000) for estates with 600 flats or less, and HK\$100,000 per year (~€10,000) for estates with 601 to 1000 flats. An additional HK\$100/flat/year is provided for all other estates with over 1000 flats. Half of the funding is designated for direct use on community building activities, printing of newsletters and minor improvement works. The



Tai Hang Tung Estate (大坑東邨) is a public housing estate in Shek Kip Mei in Kowloon, Hong Kong. The Tai Hang Tung Estate was a resettlement estate built by the British Hong Kong government in 1955, after a fire broke out the squatter area in Tai Hang Tung in 1952. The estate started redevelopment and rehabilitation in 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

remaining half is designated as Central Reserve to be monitored by the staff at Housing Department's Headquarters. From this half, 10 per cent is kept for minor environmental improvement works and 10 per cent for environmental hygiene expense and 30 per cent for enhanced partnering arrangements among EMACs and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to promote neighbourliness in public rental housing (PRH) estates.

Those managers and tenants within the system show a high level of acceptance of EMACs, according to local researches. Housing Managers also embrace tenant participation as tenant members assist in monitoring the performance of service contractors. On the other hand however, a HKHA survey from 2011 indicates that only 37 per cent PRH tenant respondents were actually aware of EMAC in 2011.

EMACs could certainly become more effective and more representative bodies if members were not appointed by the government but elected by the tenants in the estates. Also, it is a known fact that most MACs are not active, and many have not even called for Annual General Meetings to elect office-bearers. Much remains to be done, for how can we expect an inactive MAC without legitimacy to represent other tenants in offering advice / making decision in EMAC?

租戶參與



Text Assoc. Prof. LAU Kwok Yu (Dr), City University of Hong Kong, sakylau@cityu.edu.hk

Moscow and affordable housing for students

Today the problem of housing for students and graduates is very urgent and attracts much attention from universities and public organizations.

In February the Russian Tenants' Union together with the Student Association of the State University, Higher School of Economics in Moscow, organised a Roundtable conference on the problems of the insufficient rental housing market, particularly for young people. The event was attended by students and experienced tenants, as well as representatives of Best-Realty Corporation, one of the largest real estate agencies in Moscow. Participants discussed problems facing students when searching for various forms of rental accommodations, and possible ways to solve them.

Prof. Elena Shomina presented Russian and foreign experiences in rental housing and introduced the IUT and Russian Tenant Union. Prof. Shomina was followed by a presentation of the "Rent with Friend" project. The project is initiated by student Stanislav Novichenko, and aims at assisting Moscow students finding flatmates and rent flats together.

The contents of the presentations started a lively debate, which gave the students a lot of useful information. The Russian Tenants' Union rounded off the roundtable by distributing Russian and foreign publications on rental housing.

As a result of the roundtable, it was decided to create the Moscow student union of tenants, which would be a part of the Russian Tenants' Union and perform the educational function for students of Moscow universities. With the help of this organization, we are planning to organize such meetings on a permanent basis in the future.

Text Prof. Elena Shomina, vice President Russian Tenants' Union, www.ranj.ru



Few doors are open for students in Moscow.

IUT to Naples and the World Urban Forum VI

The World Urban Forum, established by the UN in 2002, runs every second year. The Urban Future is the theme of WUF VI, and IUT had chosen to highlight Young Adults and their urban future. But the housing future looks bleak in the eyes of many young adults. In every country, young people strive to become independent, self-supporting and to find a home. Together with record high unemployment figures in many countries, moving out from parent's homes is often adjourned to the future. This delayed emancipation often causes tension in the families, delayed

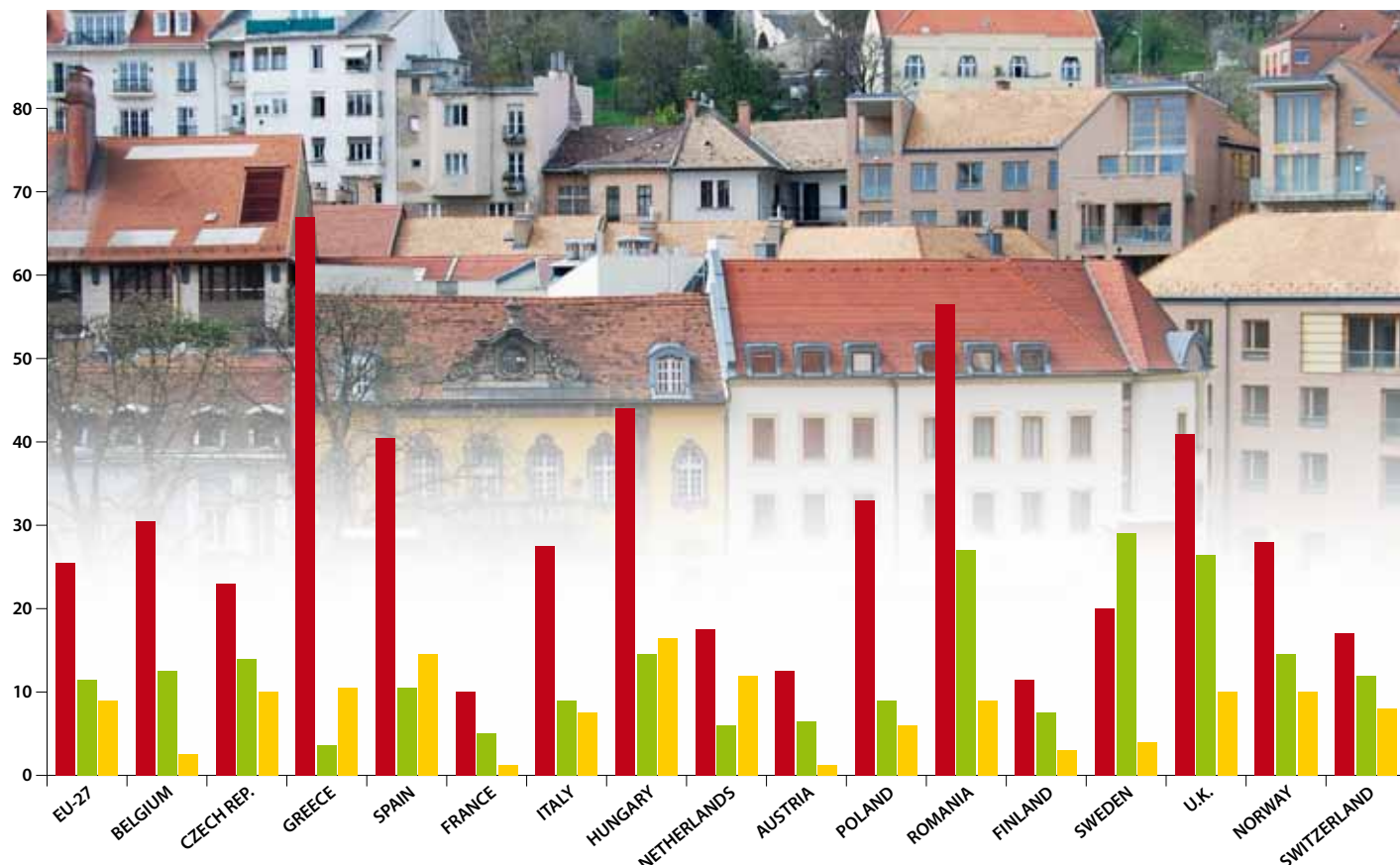


studies and postponed entry to the labour-market. Also, as a consequence, due to lack of housing men and women tend to wait for more stable

housing conditions before having their first child.

Young adult's housing situation and the urgent need for affordable rental housing will be IUT's message at the Youth Assembly, and also at WUF's other main events. The Forum takes place September 1–7.

More information from the WUF web, via www.unhabitat.org > Events, and questions about IUT's participation from info@iut.ru



The housing cost overburden rate by tenure, 2009. In the EU 27, for some 25 % of all tenants that rent at market rates, total housing costs exceed 40 % of disposable income. The housing cost overburden rate is the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income ('net' of housing allowances).

Source: Eurostat.

For full table: www.iut.nu/EU/HousingCosts2009.pdf

■ Tenant market price
■ Tenant reduced price, or free
■ Owner occupation with loan or mortgage

Lack of affordable housing, says EU

Over the last decade, worsening affordability, homelessness, social and housing polarization and new forms of housing deprivation have been an increasing concern for public policy. Also, fuel poverty is spreading in Europe. Access to affordable accommodation is a fundamental need, according to the EU Commission.

With the crisis and rise in unemployment, most countries report more defaults on housing loans and repossession, and increased cases of evictions. Member states have often reacted with measures to protect mortgage holders, strengthen income support and improve the supply of social and public housing.

In 2009 12.2 % of the EU population lived in a household that spent more than 40 % of their disposable income on housing. The housing cost overburden rate was highest for tenants paying market

rents in Greece (67 %), followed by Romania (57 %), Hungary (44%) and the UK (41%). See diagram.

In November 2011 the Commission released its Progress Report on the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Report's Annex lays down that the cost and quality of housing is key to living standards and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable people. The report further says that 38% of people at-risk of poverty in the EU spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing.

The Commission's report further analyses housing costs more in detail; rents and interest paid on mortgage make up only around 30% of total gross housing costs, while other elements – repairs, maintenance, fuel and others costs of various kind – make up some 70%. According to the Commission's Household Budget Survey, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels is the single most important item in household's expenditure corresponding to 27.7% of household consumption.

The report says that as many as 38% of people at-risk of poverty in the EU spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing.

Text Magnus Hammar/IUT

USA:

Rush for rentals



The homeownership rate has fallen from its peak of 69.4 per cent in 2004, according to census data.

By the fourth quarter of 2011, it was down to 66 per cent. That means about 2 million more households are renting. Although many families crushed by the recession have doubled up, and plenty of underemployed 20+ are living with their parents. Nearly 60 per cent of job gains in the last two years have gone to people who are 20 to 34, a crucial rental group according to an analysis based on data from the Labor Department. The limited supply is pushing up prices in some markets like in Boston, Austin TX and New York. In San Francisco, rents jumped close to 5 per cent last year.

Source: New York Times

SCOTLAND

Social Housing Charter approved



The first Scottish Social Housing Charter was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 14th March. The Charter will come into effect on 1 April 2012. The Charter lists outcomes, or results, that landlords should achieve. The Charter will be used by the Scottish Housing Regulator to look after the interests of tenants, homeless people and others who use the services that social landlords provide.

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

SWEDEN:

Worries over sale of public housing



The sale of publicly owned apartments in Sweden's capital Stockholm has been going on for years, but not without controversy. In the last week, several municipal owned housing companies have decided to sell almost 3,000 apartments in Stockholm. Thousands of tenants living in Stockholm came home to a surprise in the mailbox on Thursday night. The letter began with the news, "Willhem Real Estate Management company: your new landlord." The municipi-

pal housing company, Familjebostäder, who owns the properties in question, has decided to sell them to a private company. The decision has created a stir among tenants, who say it feels like the deal was made behind their backs.

The Social Democrats issued a press release on March 9, complaining of the secrecy involved and are demanding the city's auditors investigate the way the deals were handled.

Source: Radio Sweden

ISRAEL:

Years of neglected public housing



Public housing in Israel is in dismal condition after years of neglect. According to the Housing Ministry, there has been no public housing constructed anywhere in the country over the past 20 years. Since the year 2000, the stock of state-owned apartments available for those eligible for public housing has fallen, due to privatisation, from 107,000 to about 64,000 today, a drop of about 40 per cent in a little over a decade.

The official waiting list says that more than 2,400 are listed for public housing, according to official figures. But Community Advocacy points out that new immigrants needing housing are the responsibility of the Absorption Ministry, which currently has nearly 40,000 immigrants on its public housing waiting list.

Source: The Jerusalem Post

THE NETHERLANDS:

Rents rise 13% for new tenants



Dutch housing corporations are putting up the cost of social housing by some 13% when they are let to new tenants, according to research by Dutch Tenants Union, the Woonbond. This corresponds to around € 55 /month.

'Social housing is becoming too expensive for people on low incomes,' says Woonbond director Ronald Paping. The price of social housing is determined through a points-based system, with extra points for central heating and good local amenities, for example.

Source: DutchNews.nl

MOROCCO:

Focusing on housing



The country's housing deficit stood at roughly 608,000 units in 2011, with a significant shortfall in terms of the availability of government-sponsored accommodation, exacerbated in part by the Kingdom's move to eliminate shantytowns and shift residents into proper housing. The project, known as Cities Without Slums (Villes Sans Bidonvilles, VSB), was launched in 2004 and aims to relocate families from poorer neighbourhoods and place them into new houses in urban areas. The programme, which now impacts some 1.75m people, has seen remarkable progress towards achieving its objectives.

Source: Oxford Business Group

MACEDONIA:

Still no recognition of Right to Housing



On January 2, the state of FYR Macedonia ratified the Rev. European Social Charter – but failed to accept article 31, the Right to Housing. Furthermore, on article 13 Right to Social Assistance regarding housing benefit, the expert committee considers that social assistance benefits are not adequate on the basis that the minimum assistance that can be obtained falls below the poverty threshold.

Source: Council of Europe

ENGLAND:

Homelessness jumps by 14% in a year



The number of people officially classed as homeless in England has jumped by 14% – the biggest increase for nine years – as what charities have described as a "perfect storm" of rising repossession rates and unemployment drives thousands more families into temporary accommodation.

Across England, 48,510 households were accepted as homeless by local authorities in 2011, according to figures published by the DCLG on March 8. The data shows 69,460 children or expected children are in homeless households, with three-quarters of the households accepted containing children.

Source: The Guardian