Changing lifestyles, changing climate – the role of housing in the EU

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Recommendations from the European Housing Forum towards the EU, based on a series of four lectures

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Background

The European Housing Forum 2010 lecture series "Changing lifestyles, changing climate – the role of housing in the EU"

The EU is going through major socio-economical, environmental and demographic changes: climate change, sustained high rates of poverty in the EU, changing trends and needs of Europe's citizens, population ageing and increasing social diversity. All of these topics have one thing in common: they have a significant impact on the way we live. It raises questions on how to design EU policies that are shaped for the future, especially when these policies affect national housing policies.

Between March and June 2010, the European Housing Forum (EHF) organised a series of four in-depth lectures on the impact of changes in lifestyle and demography in the field of housing. The lecture series gathered all those interested to learn more and to debate the topics.

Housing is a national matter and not an EU competency. However, European legislation, communication and research affecting many housing related topics are affecting national housing policies.

To this end, the lecture series aimed at stimulating debate on the role the EU and its institutions play, and what role it should be playing according to Europe's housing stakeholders when it comes to different housing matters.

The conclusions drawn from the lectures and the discussions with the participants afterwards are represented in the five policy recommendations presented in this document. This policy paper aims to invite EU decision makers, stakeholders, citizens and all those interested to open discussions in order to make Europe ready to adapt to lifestyle changes and climate change.

The European Housing Forum

The European Housing Forum (EHF) was created in 1997, following the adoption of a resolution on the social aspect of housing by the European Parliament. The Forum currently has 12 members, all of which are major international or European organisations working in the area of housing.

The member organisations represent:

- housing consumers such as tenants and home owners, families and isolated persons, and people excluded from the proper housing market such as the homeless or the inadequately housed
- housing providers such as private, social and public housing landlords and private developers; and
- housing professionals such as chartered surveyors, architects, real estate managers, and researchers specialised in housing issues.

The forum exists to:

- provide an environment for debate and the sharing of information
- support the European Housing Focal Points of national ministries, as required by them
- organise thematic seminars and conferences which are open to all interested parties.

The EHF and its members promote the importance of the housing sector in Europe by creating awareness amongst EU policy makers about the impact of a growing number of EU decisions on domestic housing policies.

The EHF has a rolling chairmanship, which during the lecture series was held by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the International Union of Tenants (IUT).

www.europeanhousingforum.org

The following lectures took place:

March 2010

Marja Elsinga, professor Housing Institutions & Governance, Delft University of Technology

"Are the poor necessarily housing poor?" – Strategies on Housing Exclusion

April 2010

Peter Boelhouwer, Scientific Director, OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies

"New trends in housing – Housing requirements for changing lifestyles"

May 2010

Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, former president of the Kfw-Bankengruppe

"I don't want to leave my house!" – Housing requirements for an ageing generation'

June 2010

Darinka Czischke Director of the European Social Housing Observatory at CECODHAS

"Gentrification versus working class neighbourhoods – which urban future for Europe?"

Changing Lifestyles, Changing Climate: The Role of Housing in the EU

A changing climate, population ageing, migration and changing lifestyles have huge consequences for the design and planning of Europe's cities. In addition to the technical implications of providing well-designed, quality housing, there is also a social angle as **housing is first and foremost about people.**

This section summarises the main recommendations that arose concerning the EU dimension for policy makers and other stakeholders to take into account when preparing, designing or undertaking housing policies or projects.

> **1. The EU should take the leading role in providing sufficient and qualitative data and statistics, and support mutual learning by allowing for knowledge and information exchange**

Interestingly, each lecture came back to the same topic: there is a **clear lack of sufficient and highly qualitative comparable data and statistics, extensive research, information and knowledge exchange.**

Mutual learning and raising awareness are important when it comes to housing issues. Besides data and research, the need for information and knowledge sharing, including benchmarking initiatives on the EU level and best practices, were expressed during the lecture series. The EU can take the leading role in providing an information and knowledge sharing infrastructure between the member states and the EU itself, and, as housing markets are local, also between different urban areas and different European cities.

Data, research and information should be accessible for everyone. For instance, data on housing possibilities and issues to be aware of concerning housing when getting older should be accessible to the elderly. The data and research that the EU provides should be accessible in an easy and clear way.

> **2. In order to combat poverty under the EU2020 strategy framework, housing poverty needs to be looked at, underlining the housing dimension in the implementation of its flagship initiatives**

The high costs of housing are strongly linked to poverty and social exclusion: long-term difficulties in paying mortgage or rent can lead to relocation, homelessness and causes greater demands on social and affordable housing.

There are three key issues in housing the poor, as became clear during the first lecture: housing quality, affordability and availability. Out of these three, **availability** is the main sticking point.

Across Europe, it is difficult for people with a lower income to access decent, quality housing as the waiting lists for social housing are long. The EU should therefore ensure that member states' housing policies are offering **incentives for housing providers** to raise the level of the social housing stock in their respective countries. Housing access for the poor is vital for a more inclusive society.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, **the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU** now has the same legal value as treaties, including Article 34(3) that gives the right to housing assistance for those who lack sufficient resources. This Article should be respected and its impact should be analysed by the EU, possibly by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in order to better understand its consequences for EU policies.

The flagship initiatives, especially the "European platform against poverty" and "Resource efficient Europe" flagships under the **EU2020 strategy** should underline the housing dimension of policies.

> **3. To improve the energy efficiency of Europe's housing stock, financial incentives for homeowners, tenants and landlords need to be considered to offset costs**

Europe's housing stock needs to adapt to new trends and new lifestyles of its citizens like increased mobility and a growing importance of lifestyle. It is important that housing projects that aim to respond to these trends are energy efficient.

However, focus should not only be on new housing, but also on how to make improvements in the **energy efficiency of existing homes** where a high level of carbon savings can be achieved. Also, special attention should be given to the energy efficiency of low-income households.

There are challenges that need to be overcome. Beyond relatively simple measures such as cavity wall and loft insulation, improvements can be difficult, disruptive and expensive to make. Policies are needed that address these potential barriers. Besides the technical aspects, the public sector has a duty to promote behavioural change.

Financial incentives for homeowners, tenants and landlords need to be considered to offset the cost of these improvements in order to guarantee that housing does not become even more unaffordable for the vulnerable segments of the population.

Other policy measures should focus on changing consumer behaviour through political leadership, especially at the local level. This is vital in establishing the will to start and implement substantial Renovation programmes.

Also, housing should become a priority in the second Energy Efficiency Action Plan or Strategy.

Finally, the European Housing Forum welcomed the inclusion of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures in the current ERDF programming period and urges Housing Ministers to ensure that this EU funding possibility is expanded for the new **structural funds period 2013-2019.**

Lessons Learnt

4. The issue of population ageing and its consequences for housing should be addressed by the EU at an early stage, analysing member states' needs in designing policies

The issue of population ageing was discussed during the third lecture. According to the EC Demography Report 2008, the population aged 60 years and above will continue to grow by 2 million people every year for the next 25 years. As only 1% of the European housing stock is completely adapted to the needs of older people, this poses a challenge for Europe with regards to housing availability for the elderly.

The best way to deal with population ageing from a housing point of view, is to focus on taking **preventative measures.** Most elderly people prefer to stay in their own home, which should therefore be supported. Prevention measures will also remove pressure from healthcare services.

The EU should provide **incentives for cooperation initiatives** between housing providers, service providers, residents and local governments. Special attention should be paid to consumer friendly certification of housing services for the elderly.

Housing requirements for an ageing population, i.e. barrier free and age-appropriate reconstructions of urban districts should be included and expanded in the **post-2013 structural funds period** and urban renewal funding in order to reduce deficits of living conditions for older people.

5. The EU should make use of employment policies to reduce social segregation making use of the structural funds

The fourth lecture highlighted how the world is becoming increasingly urban and increasingly diverse and discussed the ways to deal with social diversity from an urban planning angle.

Developing a European housing model for social integration is nearly impossible. One of the most important tools for social integration are **activities:** social activities related to primary and secondary schools, neighbourhood activities, etc. The most important activity for social integration however, is employment. The EU can empower people on the employment side. It can increase **employment opportunities for vulnerable households** in segregated areas and via this policy tool create neighbourhoods where people are integrated. The availability of structural funds such as the ESF are an appropriate tool to reach this goal.

Conclusions

Housing policy is and will remain a national competence. Housing is about people, and as local circumstances differ, so should housing policies.

Nevertheless, there are common challenges that need to be addressed, and it is because of this that the EU could, and indeed should, play a supportive role by:

- Providing comparable data
- Providing a platform for the exchange of best practice
- Assist national housing policies through EU funding mechanisms, e.g. in the fields of energy and housing, social cohesion and ageing society

The European Housing Forum will continue to assist (EU) policy makers in understanding the effects of EU legislation and initiatives on housing policy.

**First EHF Lecture by Marja Elsinga, Professor
Housing Institutions & Governance, Delft University
of Technology**

Facts, findings and figures

Over 79 million people (16%) in the EU are currently at risk
of poverty, which means having an income below 60% of the
median household income of the respective country. About
the same percentage of people suffer from material deprivation.[1]

Housing costs comprise on average one fifth of disposable
income in Europe.[2] The high costs of housing are strongly linked
to poverty and social exclusion: long-term difficulties in paying
mortgage or rent can lead to relocation, homelessness and can
cause greater demands on social housing[3]

Housing poverty can be defined as having a bad quality of
dwelling, a bad quality of neighbourhood, overcrowding and
housing costs that exceed 40% of ones total income[4] In the
EU-27, one in eight persons faced housing costs in excess of
40% of their income in 2007.[5]

Housing quality is generally lower for the poor than for the non-
poor. Besides inadequate living standards this also has financial
implications, as the bad state (e.g. bad insulation, leaking roofs,
damping walls, electricity problems) of houses of people unable
to afford decent housing results in even higher electricity bills.

The housing market can increase and decrease income poverty:

- Either by housing market developments, i.e. different price
  developments in different segments of the market;

- Or by housing policy: social housing, tax policies, housing
  allowances, etc. Housing policy can also help to reduce
  expenses and increase quality.[6]

Policy recommendations on housing poverty in the EU

Article 34(3) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of
the European Union states: "In order to combat social
exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects
the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure
a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient
resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by
Community law and national laws and practices."

As housing is a national competence, the EU has no
specific legislation on poverty-housing matters. However,
with the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty **the Charter of
Fundamental Rights now has the same legal value as
EU treaties.** Therefore the EU has to respect this article
when it enacts legislation and in its other activities such
as providing financial support through the ESF and ERDF.
As the right to housing assistance is a fundamental right,
its impact should be analysed in order to better understand
its consequences for EU policies. This could be executed
by the EU commissioner for fundamental rights and the EU
Agency for Fundamental Rights.

The implementation of an EU common approach seems
difficult as **the underlying issues on housing the poor
vary widely between Member States.** However, there
are aspects on which the EU can positively exert influence
in order to decrease housing poverty in Europe.

At the moment there is a lack of data on the relationship
between housing and poverty. It is necessary to ensure
that EU Member States and institutions can rely on
homogenous and accurate housing statistics and
adequate indicators. Therefore, existing data needs to
be improved and extended. **The EU should take the
lead in producing comparable housing statistics that
fill the knowledge gap and further develop housing
related data collection in the framework of EU-SILC.**
Also, mutual learning and raising awareness e.g. under
PROGRESS and URBACT programmes, is an element
where the EU can make a difference.

The EU2020 strategy constitutes an agreement to reduce
poverty in the European Union by 20% before 2020.
Measuring tools used should include indicators related to
overcrowding and quality of housing instead of only
income and employment related measures. Furthermore,
in the implementation of the flagship initiatives the
housing dimension should be underlined, specifically in
the "European platform against poverty" and "Resource
efficient Europe" flagships.

Subject subsidies such as housing allowances are income dependent and therefore an efficient tool to increase housing affordability. Housing affordability needs specific attention, especially for the most vulnerable. **Housing allowances are vital for an inclusive society and must therefore be kept or even increased.** The EU should encourage Member States to offer decent housing to people in risk of poverty. However, it is also necessary to have an amount of **object subsidies** to address affordable housing and to prevent housing allowances from inflating house prices.

One of housing policy's aims is to prevent the poor from falling into homelessness and also to reduce overall homelessness rates. The study discussed in the lecture proved that progress on homelessness is possible, irrespective of the member states' welfare regime or its housing market. The EU member states have recently committed to develop national homeless strategies. Relating to the outcomes of the study, this is a favourable development and this asks for the European Commission to monitor progress member states make towards this commitment on a regular basis.

Mortgage-free ownership among the elderly can be a substantial part of their income. Older people can use housing equity, i.e. selling ones house and using it as a pension while continuing to live in it and thus combating poverty in old age. National governments should investigate policy opportunities that look into this.

Concluding: there are increased risks of poverty amongst the most vulnerable, mainly due to rising living and energy costs and rapidly growing housing shortages in the capital regions and areas that are characterized by a high housing demand, high prices and many employment opportunities.

About Marja Elsinga

Professor Housing Institutions & Governance, Delft University of Technology (The Netherlands)

Marja Elsinga works as associate professor/senior researcher in the housing market and housing policy field. She serves on the editorial board of the journal 'Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting' and as review editor for the European Journal of Housing Policy.

Marja graduated in housing ecology at the University of Wageningen in 1989. In 1995 she obtained her doctorate with distinction on the subject 'Home ownership for low-income groups'. She was a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Maassluis housing association, a member of the supervisory board of PWS housing association in Rotterdam and strategic policy officer at Woondrecht housing association in Dordrecht. She is currently an active board member of the Nederlandse Woonbond (Dutch National Tenants' Association).

Second EHF Lecture by Peter Boelhouwer, Scientific Director, OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban & Mobility Studies

Facts, findings and figures
Demographic change

Recent decades have shown a profound change in the composition of families, family lives and households. Between 1990 and 2003, the average age at first marriage rose from 24.8 years to 27.4 years for women and from 27.5 to 29.8 years for men. Divorce rates increased significantly since the 70s. Nowadays, 20% of all marriages involve persons entering into a second marriage. Furthermore, since the 60s, the average household size declined and the number of households grew more than the average population growth. In 2005, 27% of all households were single-person households. A contributing factor for this is the general increase in economic prosperity, which has made it affordable for people to live in smaller households: parents and adult children are no longer forced to live together for economic reasons. However, young people spending more years in education have resulted in young adults remaining longer in the parental household.[7]

Demographic changes have resulted in many different household types. There are, for example, the 'traditional' nuclear families, single-parent households with kids, divorced parents that have their kids over for the weekend, an increasing amount of single-person households and households that are composed of married or unmarried couples. In the future, the trend towards smaller households is expected to continue even further as a result of population ageing.

Economic developments

Globalisation is affecting the way we live. Businesses have become more mobile and the labour market has become international. Nowadays, fewer people stay in the same house, neighbourhood or even country throughout their life. This results in a need for flexible housing that is fit for, for example:

• labour migrants, for instance from Central and Eastern Europe

• expats and knowledge workers from all over the world.

Furthermore, globalisation has increased the demand for second homes, for recreational purposes as well as for employment purposes.[8]

Besides this, there is a trend in what is called 'glocalisation'. People are increasingly regional-orientated, thinking globally but acting locally. That trend is visible in modern housing requirements. People want the local style to be visible in the design of their home.

Socio-Cultural developments

There is a growing importance of lifestyle and identity, especially in marketing. People also have more choice in society, the information society is gaining in influence and there are increasing regional differences in housing demand.

These developments clearly have an impact on housing and the way we live. Three different trends can be discovered when looking at the housing market today.

1. A growing interest in living in communities and in common-interest housing concepts.

2. Increasing internationalisation and a growing number of people who own more than one residence.

3. A trend towards amenity-based housing: housing that is mixed with other services such as care, leisure, retail and education.[9]

These trends have to be picked up by the housing market and have to be recognised by policy makers.

Policy recommendations on lifestyle change and the European housing market

Housing projects need to be energy-efficient. As energy-efficient measures in general increase the costs of a project, incentives from the EU like the ERDF fund supporting energy efficiency investments in housing should be maintained post 2013. Also, policies should be designed that encourages the **improvement of the energy performance of the existing housing stock.** This could be done by means of energy pilot projects initiated at the EU level. Also, special attention should be given to the energy efficiency of low-income households.

At the moment there is a lack of attention to the social dimension of energy efficiency in housing. Refurbishment for energy efficiency should be made affordable for people on low incomes. After renovation, home owners should be able to recuperate the investment made while the tenant's total cost does not increase instead of forcing inhabitants to move due to increase rent. This can be reached by state subsidies for home owners and landlords.

Member States should ensure that housing policies that respond to the mentioned trends are addressed at the lowest national level. Due to large differences within the national housing market such as big housing shortages in the economic centers and a lot of empty dwellings in the rural regions, policies should be designed for regional markets instead.

Furthermore, in order for the housing market to respond to the trends, the **supply-side of housing** and housing providers should be incentivised to pay **more attention to mixed-use development.** Governments should look for models that integrate leisure, healthcare and nature into housing. Also, cooperation initiatives of housing and other service providers such as healthcare providers and social support services should be stimulated.

About Peter Boelhouwer

Professor Housing Systems, Delft University of Technology Scientific Director, OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban & Mobility Studies

After graduating in social geography from the University of Utrecht in 1983 Peter Boelhouwer (1958) was awarded a PhD for his research into the effects of the sale of rented homes by social housing associations. After his dissertation was published, Boelhouwer moved to the OTB Research Institute, where he spent most of his time in the first few years researching rent and subsidy policy.

On 1 December the Architecture Faculty recommended Boelhouwer for appointment to the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Chair in Housing Systems. Since then he has spent one day a week at the faculty where he is responsible for the housing policy component of the Master's programme in Real Estate and Housing. Several months previously, on 1 September 2003, he succeeded Professor Priemus as Scientific Director of the OTB Research Institute and Director of the Delft Centre for Sustainable Urban Areas at Delft University of Technology.

Peter Boelhouwer has sat on numerous boards connected with building and housing and is currently on the supervisory board of two housing associations. He is also Editor-in-Chief of Housing and the Built Environment and a member of the advisory committee for the European Journal of Housing Policy. Finally, he also sits on the boards of the European Network for Housing Research and NETHUR national research school.
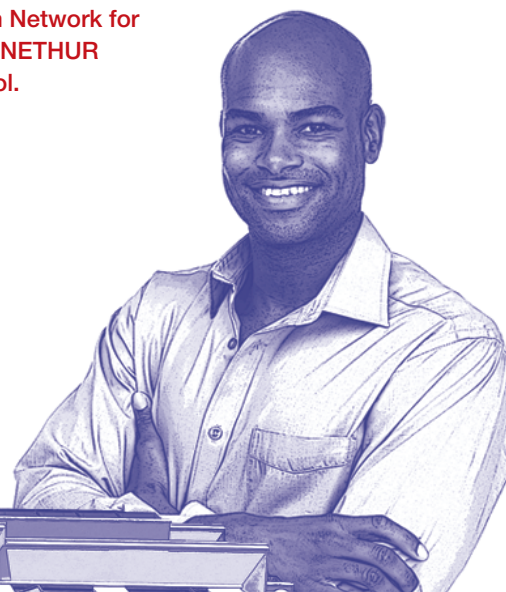
Third lecture by Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, former spokesperson of the board of KfW Bankengruppe and Member of the Advisory Board of the German Association for Housing, Urban and Spatial Development

Facts, findings and figures

The ageing of the baby boom generation is no longer something that will happen at some point in the distant future. This generation, born around 60 years ago, is now starting to retire in large numbers. According to the EC Demography Report 2008, the population aged 60 years and above will continue to grow by 2 million people every year for the next 25 years.

The fastest growing age group will be people aged 80 or over. Their proportion in the population could almost triple from 4% now to 11% by 2050. This is also due to the fact that over the past decades life expectancy has increased. Over the past 40 years, Europeans gained 2.5 extra life years per decade as a result of economic growth and improved health care.

Furthermore, the growth of the working-age population will come to a halt by 2014. From then on, this group will be shrinking by 1 to 1.5 million people each year. By 2050, the ratio of working age people vs. those of pension age will be 1:2, compared to 1:4 today.

As many of the elderly live alone, the number of single-person households will increase with large numbers. It is estimated that around 51.6 million older people will live alone in 2050, while in 2001 this was 32.3 million. In most European countries the number of these small households is therefore likely to increase by at least 50%.

Only 1% of the European housing stock is adapted to the needs of older people. This percentage differs significantly across the EU's member states: the Netherlands, for example, have a housing stock of which 5% is adapted and where 50% is designed for further adaptation. Most countries have a small proportion of the housing stock that is 100% barrier-free, but not enough to meet future housing demands, especially in Eastern Europe.

Challenges

This demographic shift poses an increasing challenge to Europe's society. Not only economically and socially, but more specifically also regarding housing availability and affordability for the elderly.

Housing that is fit for the elderly

The fact that there will be more people of old age means that there needs to be sufficient housing that fits their needs. More houses need to be built in order to respond to the increase in single households. These houses also need to be adapted to different needs. Older people often desire to continue to live in their own home and not in a care facility. This means that these homes should be adapted to their needs, such as step-free access, non-slip treads and suitable bath equipment.

Older inhabitants who no longer take part in the labour market spend more time at home. Their housing and service needs are therefore very different from those of the population of working age.[12] Proximity to shops, medical care and other services are also of particular importance.

Affordability of housing

As the group of people of working age is declining, and there are more people to take care of, it is likely that public pension schemes will be reformed. This means that there will be less financial resources for housing among certain elderly, making it more difficult to afford decent housing. The challenge lies in adapting housing-related policies to allow the elderly to afford housing financially: creative solutions have to be found to ensure an inclusive and qualitative old-age.

However, housing is not only a cost. It can also be a source of income, especially for home owners. New financial products such as annuities and equity release schemes could make it easier to convert housing wealth into a regular retirement income. More transparency and financial education is needed to use these possibilities fully.[13]

Policy recommendations on population ageing and the European housing market

The EU should get better aware of demographic developments by conducting more extensive research on the consequences of population ageing and demographic change. **Demographic changes should be taken into account when drawing up policies, and although not a competence, housing implications should not be ignored at EU level.**

In its publications concerning an ageing society, the EU should address housing issues and stimulate national, regional and local policies to address the issue at an early stage and raise political awareness. The EU should also assist and support member states in analysing their housing adaptation needs due to the ageing population and in designing respective national and regional policies, instruments and programs. There should also be a **benchmarking initiative** on the European level that supports exchange of good practice.

Most elderly prefer to age in their own home. Senior friendly housing is not only a question of a barrier free access to the apartments and the respective equipment inside the flats. **Also an appropriate and barrier-free residential environment is decisive.** Health care or shopping facilities, local public transport or social infrastructures located near-by can help to let people stay in their apartment. **Barrier free living is not only related to the elderly**, as also young families with children as well as the disabled can benefit from such living conditions. Focus should be on taking preventive measures by extending services and increase social infrastructure in and around these homes and not move the elderly to residential care, if possible.

This is not only more desirable from a social viewpoint, it is also more economical as adapting homes is not very expensive while nursing homes are costly. Prevention measures will also remove pressure from health care.

The EU should provide incentives for **cooperation initiatives** between housing providers, service providers, residents and local governments. Special attention should be paid to consumer friendly certification of housing services for the elderly.

People should start thinking about where and how they will live in retirement already as of 55. It is necessary to plan old age, to think about the future. Therefore, awareness raising among citizens is a key element in preparing people for old age. Furthermore, **it is extremely important that older people are able to -make informed choices about their housing.** There should be easy access to information. An EU campaign on what to do and how to do it when retiring should be considered, focusing also on financial possibilities. Within the European Parliament, the Urban Intergroup and the Ageing Intergroup should join forces on this issue.

Housing requirements for an ageing society should be included in the discussion on the post-2013 structural funds period. Make measures for age-appropriate reconstructions of the living environment eligible for funding from structural funds, e.g. by expanding the current European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) eligibility for energy efficiency or renewable energy measures in housing. (Regulation No 397/2009)

About Ingrid Matthäus-Maier

Member of the Advisory Board of the German Association for Housing, Urban and Spatial Development.

Ingrid Matthäus-Maier is a German politician and banker and is a Member of the Advisory Board of the German Association for Housing, urban and Spatial Development.

She studied law in Giessen and Münster, graduating with the second state examination. She served as a research assistant at the Münster Higher Administrative Court and then as an Administrative Court judge in Münster. In 1969 Ms. Matthäus-Maier joined the FDP and became Member of the North Rhine-Westphalia Executive Committee and of the FDP Federal Executive Committee.

In 1976 she was appointed a Member of the German Parliament where she served as Chairwoman of the Finance Committee from 1979 to 1982. In 1982 she resigned all posts and left the FDP. She joined the SPD, was reelected, and became Deputy Chairwoman of the SPD parliamentary group. In 1999 she resigned her seat in Parliament and joined KfW's Board of Managing Directors. Ingrid Matthäus-Maier was Spokeswoman of the Board of Managing Directors of KfW Banking Group from 2006 to 2008.

Gentrification vs. Working Class Neighbourhoods: Which Urban Future for Europe?

Fourth lecture by Darinka Czischke, research director of the European Social Housing Observatory at Cecodhas

When thinking about Europe's urban future, a key challenge is how to tackle increasing social and cultural diversity in urban areas. Hence, the question of gentrification vs. working class neighbourhoods needs to be re-phrased in terms of what policy approaches work best to foster social cohesion amongst highly diverse urban dwellers.

Facts, findings and figures

For the first time in history, since 2008 just over half of the world's population lives in urban areas. Furthermore, UN-Habitat estimates show that this percentage will rise to 70% in 2050.[14] Against this background, two trends stand out: on the one hand, unprecedented urban sprawl is happening in many cities, partly due to lifestyle choices (such as suburban living) and to widespread car use. For example, while the population of a city like Palermo in Italy grew 50% from mid-1950s to late 1990s, its surface increased 200% over the same period. There are a number of debates related to the negative aspects of sprawling cities, notably environmental impacts such as the increase in waste, transport costs and energy consumption.[15] In addition, amongst the socio-spatial impacts associated with urban sprawl is social urban segregation, which tends to aggravate inequalities in those cities.

A second trend is the increasing social diversity in urban areas undergoing accelerated growth, mainly due to migration. Recent figures show the population of the European Union surpassed 500 million people at the beginning of 2010, with migration accounting for 63% of the 1.4 million population growth in the EU in 2009.[16] This increasing social and cultural diversity opens up discussions about multiculturalism, social integration and segregation. A key question is how to achieve and/or maintain social cohesion in such highly diverse urban societies.

How is policy responding to these developments? Overall, two policy approaches stand out: on the one hand, an approach based on 'provision' i.e. the construction and/or allocation of housing, infrastructure, services, retail, etc. On the other hand, a 'spatial' approach to policy, notably the so-called "area-based approach" that has been mainstreamed in most of Europe for the past decades as a way to focus on specific urban areas facing acute physical, economic and social decline.

In this lecture, two examples of area-based policy tools dealing with social integration were discussed in detail, namely: a) Density and b) Social mix. Both types of policies imply the physical coexistence of different social groups in urban space. While density (as opposed to sprawl) is supposed to provide better opportunities for all urban dwellers to access what the city has to offer (notably access to jobs, education, services, amenities, etc.), social mix is thought as a way to encourage social interaction between different social groups thanks to living in close proximity. However, the lecture discussed the relative merits on each of these approaches (and their respective assumptions) on the basis of evidence from recent research[17] and case studies.[18] In particular, two questions were addressed: 1) Is density better than urban sprawl? (environmentally, socially, economically); and 2) Does proximity bring about integration? (Social mix vs. "social rubbing"?).

Policy recommendations on urban planning and social integration

The issue of gentrification vs. working class neighbourhoods is to be reconsidered. In post-industrial urban centres the key question is how to live together in today's ever growing and increasingly socially diverse cities and the role that urban and housing policies have on this. In this regard, the evidence from case studies reviewed in the lecture provided key lessons:

On **urban density**, a key finding was the need to re-evaluate density as a planning tool. Indeed, **the diversity of lifestyles and life-cycles needs to be considered** when planning for denser cities, as these areas offer different opportunities for different types of people. For example, while singles, couples without children, recent immigrants, etc. make the most of dense, centrally located urban areas, other groups such as families with children and empty nesters wanting to be close to their children aspire to move to less dense, suburban areas where they can afford more space.

In addition, it is worth considering the impact that gentrification often has on lower-income residents who are forced to leave attractive inner city regions which are in the focus of market-led regeneration. Those residents often end up 'trapped' in dense areas in the suburbs which are the only affordable housing option.

On **social mix**, a key question is whether living in close proximity to other social groups is synonymous of social integration. While social integration across socially diverse groups is a desirable policy goal, there is a distinction to be made between "socially mixing" and "socially rubbing". The fact that people from different backgrounds live in close proximity does not necessarily guarantee social interaction. However, if well designed and implemented, social mix policies may provide better chances for vulnerable people to access the opportunities the city has to offer. The latter include access to jobs, education, services, etc. thanks to provision of affordable housing in good locations. Furthermore, **there is a role for urban design** in promoting typological similarity and harmonized standards between 'private' and 'social' housing, so as to avoid visual stigmatization of the latter. This includes designing-out physical barriers (e.g. buffers), etc. Another key lesson in this regard was the key role of schools in promoting social integration, which requires an integrated, cross-sector approach to policy making.

As regards the role that the European Union could have in tackling these challenges, the discussion highlighted that, although housing and urban issues are outside its competence, there are a number of initiatives the latter could contribute with:

• The EU could foster knowledge exchange between urban areas. The EU could stimulate EU cities to learn from each other on these issues, as it already does for example, through the URBACT-programme. There is a wealth of activities and research being carried out at national and local level that can be further systematized and disseminated at EU-level, something the EU could facilitate

• The EU could facilitate the collection and dissemination of comparable data and research in the urban and housing fields, not just on statistics but also on qualitative data

• The EU can promote social integration in cities through encouraging policies promoting employment opportunities for vulnerable households in segregated areas, for example through the use of EU funding such as the ESF.

About Darinka Czischke

Director of the European Social Housing Observatory at CECODHAS

Darinka Czischke is an urban and housing sociologist. She holds an MSc in Regional and Urban Planning (Distinction) from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

She is the Director of the European Social Housing Observatory at CECODHAS and Guest Researcher on Social entrepreneurship in housing at Delft University of Technology. She is also Thematic Expert on housing and social inclusion for the URBACT SUITE programme. She has conducted extensive research on housing, urban density and social inclusion in cities. Her experience includes working at the London School of Economics' Cities programme and Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (LSE/CASE), and at the Greater London Authority. She has also advised the Chilean government on a path breaking new policy approach to housing and social mix.

European Housing Forum members

The European Housing Forum members are:

RICS – Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Co-chair)

RICS is the world's leading qualification when it comes to professional standards in land, property and construction, with over 100 000 property professionals working worldwide. Its Royal Charter requires RICS to act in the public interest.

IUT – International Union of Tenants (Co-chair)

IUT is a Non Governmental Organisation with the purpose of safeguarding the interest of tenants. It has got 58 member associations in 46 countries.

CECODHAS Housing Europe – The Federation of public, cooperatives and social housing

CECODHAS Housing Europe is a network of national and regional housing federations of housing organisations.

Together the 45 members in 21 European members States manage 25 million dwellings which represent 12% of the total housing stock.

Its members work together for a Europe that provides access to decent and affordable housing for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where all are enabled to reach their full potential.

COFACE – The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union

COFACE is a pluralistic organisation which aims at promoting family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. Quality housing conditions are essential for a harmonious family life and the well-being of all members of the family.

ENHR – European Network for Housing Research

The Network is composed of researchers from a variety of social science disciplines dealing with housing and urban issues. In addition to its basic goal of supporting research, the Network also seeks to promote contacts and communications between researchers and practitioners within the housing field. It has more than 1000 individual and nearly 100 institutional members representing every country in Europe.

European Social Housing Observatory

The Observatory is a research and knowledge engine for CECODHAS policy work. Its main aim is to identify and analyse key trends and research needs in the field of housing and social housing at European level.

Eurocities – The European Network of Major European Cities

Eurocities is the network of major European cities. It brings together the local governments of more than 140 large cities in over 30 European countries.

FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

FEANTSA is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. It is the only major European network that focuses exclusively on homelessness at European level.

GEFI – European Network of Real Estate Owners and Managers

GEFI is a non-profit organisation representing national organisations from the EU27, which promotes private property, real estate property, sustainable housing and urban development.

RHF – Réseau Habitat et Francophonie

RHF brings together professional agencies from the social housing and urban development sectors in French-speaking countries.

UEPC – European Union of Developers and House Builders

UEPC is an international non-profit association which represents national federations of developers and house builders. Through its national members, UEPC represents more than 30 000 developing and house building companies.

ACE – The Architects' Council of Europe

ACE is the European organisation representing the architectural profession at European level.

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Interesting data portals, studies and websites

EU-SILC: database of comparable indicators on social cohesion used for policy monitoring at the EU level. Can be found on **http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/living_conditions_and_social_protection/introduction/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions**

URBACT programme: a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. Can be found on: **http://urbact.eu/**

TU Delft University Research Institute for Housing, Urban & Mobility Studies http://www.otb2.tudelft.nl/

The European Network for Housing Research: **http://www.enhr.ibf.uu.se/about.html**

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