

HOUSING NOTES Summer 2015

Research Committee 43 Housing and the Built Environment

International Sociological Association

From the President

Research Committee 43 (RC43) had its origins forty years ago in sessions held at the 1974 Uppsala Congress and has since organized sessions on housing-related topics at each subsequent World Congress of Sociology. In addition, it conducts biennial international conferences and has sponsored a number of smaller regional meetings.

RC43 is a multi-disciplinary group of researchers with a focus on housing and the built environment. Since the topics of housing and the built environment do not belong to any one discipline, members come from an array of disciplines including sociology, geography, political science, economics, planning and public policy.

Membership in RC43 is global, covering nearly every continent and more than 30 countries. Contacts between group members have led to mutual visits, guest lectures, and collaboration in research and practice. Given its long history and excellent reputation, the International Sociological Association serves as an appropriate home for scholars focused on the many aspects of housing and the built environment.

The objectives of RC43 are:

- To create an international community among scholars in the field of housing and the built environment;
- To promote the development of social science theory and research on housing and the built environment;
- To contribute to informed decisions regarding intervention in and invention of housing and the built environments supportive of human needs.

This newsletter is intended to share new research and ideas among RC43 members, to help grow collaborative scholarship through the research committee and to encourage greater membership and participation in both the RC43 and the ISA. Each newsletter, which is published twice yearly (Summer and Winter), will feature a short article on a timely topic and listings of recent publications of interest to the members. We welcome feedback and value your input.

Janet Smith, RC43 President

Please send ideas for updates as well as books, publications and events to feature on relevant housing and built environment policy, theory and practice to isa.rc43@gmail.com.

ISA and RC43 Events

2015 September 17-19, Chicago, USA. *Housing in an Unequal World*. RC43.

This conference will explore housing policies in the context of growing inequality and polarization. isarc43.wix.com/2015-conference.

2016 July 10-14, Vienna, Austria. The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World. Third ISA Forum of Sociology, International Sociological Association. www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/

2017 May. Hong Kong. RC43.

2018 July. Toronto, Canada. XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology.

A changing climate: social housing in Canada

By **Sarah Cooper**, Housing Notes Editor

Social housing operating agreements in Canada are expiring, and are not being replaced. The operating agreements were signed to provide subsidies for social housing units. Agreements were usually set for the term of the mortgage on the property, ranging from 25-50 years. As agreements expire, the subsidies end too, and no new long-term funds are available.

The expiring social housing agreements are part of the rolling-back of the social safety net and the welfare state. From the 1940s to the 1960s, the Government of Canada partnered with the provinces to build and manage public housing. In the 1970s, new federal programs focused on housing construction and management by non-profit organizations and cooperatives. At its peak, there were over 620,000 units of social and public housing across Canada, housing about five percent of households.

In 1993 all new funding for social housing was cut. For close to a decade very little social housing was built. Today, there is limited funding for affordable housing construction, but still, no money for long-term subsidies. By 2040, when all the operating agreements will have expired, the Government of Canada will 'save' close to \$2 billion dollars a year. The implications of this change are unknown, because there is no systematic way to gather data from housing providers on how they are responding.

However, the Canadian Housing Renewal Association estimates that two-thirds of the social housing units in Canada—where the subsidies made up the difference between the rents paid by the tenant and the operating costs—are at risk. Many housing units have already been lost. This will have a significant impact not only on the households currently living in the subsidized units, but also on the social housing sector as a whole.

New books

Clapham, D. 2015. *Accommodating Difference: Evaluating Supported Housing for Vulnerable People*. Bristol: Policy Press.

This important book explores the impact of different forms of policy and practice on the lives of vulnerable people, arguing for a flexible policy approach that places people in control of their own lives. It puts forward an original evaluation framework and applies this to case studies of provision in Britain and Sweden - two countries with long and differing experiences - to raise interesting and important issues for the future (from Springer).

Turkington, R. and C. Watson. 2015. *Renewing Europe's Housing*. Bristol: Policy Press.

"An excellent overview of housing renewal policies across nine European countries, offering a deeper understanding of the barriers to the implementation of more effective and integrated urban renewal policies in different cultures." Martin Lux, Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic (from the Policy Press website).

Chen, J., Stephens, M. & Man, Y. (eds). 2014. *The Future of Public Housing: Ongoing Trends in the East and the West*. Springer.

This book aims to examine the recent remarkable revival in public housing in the Asian and other emerging urban economies, set against the continued stagnation and decline of the sector in the western countries (from Preface).

Yang, Z. and J. Chen. 2014. *Housing Affordability and Housing Policy in Urban China*. Berlin: Springer.

Housing affordability is a big challenge for many households in urban China. In the late 1990s, public housing was privatized, enabling households to choose where to live. However, at the same time, it increased the cost of housing, resulting in increased inequality and differential access to housing.

Huang, Y. and S. Li. 2014. *Housing Inequality in Chinese Cities*. Routledge.

“This book shows how China’s spectacular housing success is not shared by all social groups, with rapidly rising housing inequality, and residential segregation increasingly prevalent in previously homogeneous Chinese cities. It focuses on the two extremes of the residential landscape, and reveals the stark contrast between low-income households who live in shacks in so-called ‘urban villages’ and the nouveaux riches who live in exclusive gated villa communities. Over four parts, the contributors look at the degree to which inequality affects Chinese cities, and the extent of residential differentiation; housing for the urban poor, and in particular, housing for migrants from rural China; housing for the rapidly expanding Chinese middle class and the new rich; and finally, governance in residential neighborhoods.” (from the Routledge website)

Peppercorn, I.G. and C. Taffin. 2013. *Rental Housing: Lessons from international experience and policies for emerging markets*. Directions in Development. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

After the 2007 housing market crash in the US, many governments are recognizing that homeownership for everyone is not a realistic goal. Instead, rental housing—already in place, though often informally or poorly regulated—can provide housing for a wide range of affordability levels and household make-ups.

Forrest, R. and N.m. Yip. (eds.) 2012. *Young people and housing: Transitions, trajectories and generational fractures*. London: Routledge.

Emerging from a symposium in Hong Kong in 2011, the chapters in this book examine the housing experiences of youth and young adults in a variety of countries. While recognizing that the contexts in each country are different, the chapters examine common themes including family and transitions to adulthood, affordability and housing trajectories, and economic change and generational fractures.

Nicol, L.A. 2012. *Sustainable collective housing: policy and practice*. London: Routledge.

Nicol uses the institutional regimes framework to consider the regulatory context for multi-family housing and housing sustainability, in order to clarify this context to improve the housing stock and sustainability.

Recent publications

Geller, L. 2014. **Putting Housing First**. *Canadian Nurse* 110(5): 22-27.

This article describes the recent At Home/Chez Soi project in Canada, which demonstrated that a Housing First approach is an effective way to address homelessness.

Samara, T.R. 2014. **Rise of the Renter Nation: Solutions to the housing affordability crisis**. Right to the City Alliance, Homes for All Campaign. Available at: homesforall.org/campaign/news/renter-nation-month-of-action

This report describes the current state of rental housing in the United States, and proposes policy directions that would support rental housing as an affordable housing option.

2014. **Special Issue: Public Housing Futures**. *Housing Studies* 29(4).

A special issue of *Housing Studies* that focuses on public housing histories and potential futures.

Canadian Housing Renewal Association. 2014. **Housing for All: Sustaining and renewing social housing for low-income households**. Ottawa: CHRA. Available at www.chra-achru.ca/media/content/A%20Review%20of%20Housing%20Policy.pdf

CHRA takes an in-depth look at the issue of expiring operating agreements and its impact on social housing - on those who live there and those who provide it. While making clear that the current situation is untenable, the Report takes a progressive view of how to move forward over the next 20 to 25 years, to avoid the instability that currently threatens up to 365,000 low-income households who live in social housing.

Of interest

Imaging Homelessness in a City of Care. Weblog. Available at escrimaginghomelessness.wordpress.com/about/

A blog showcasing maps and photos created by homeless people in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. "The focus of the project, 'imaging Homelessness in a City of Care', was the development of a participant-led exhibition, constituted from 3 elements: firstly, a series of annotated maps tracing the life-histories of 30 homeless people; secondly, a 'composite' map – produced by Lovely Jojo – incorporating all 30 of the participants' life-histories; and thirdly, a collection of photographic images assembled by a smaller group of homeless people." (from the website)

FOReTHOUGHT... making space for planning. Weblog. Available at sheffield-planning.org/

FOReTHOUGHT is a blog from the University of Sheffield's Department of Town and Regional Planning. Its goal is to "nurture a space for critical reflection and engagement, for intervention, debate and dialogue over the purpose and application of 'planning', in its broadest and most multi-disciplinary sense". It is open to submissions from planners and those outside the discipline, and seeks to be a space for collective learning.

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