"Mass Housing in Eastern and Western Europe, 1947-1989: a European project"
by Danièle Voldman (CNRS-Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)
and Annie Fourcaut (Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Immediately after the Second World War, Europe experienced a housing crisis attributable to several causes. The causes most easily understood by historical analysis result from a combination of three factors at work in all countries: wartime destruction, population movements and renewed demographic growth. After this first period when the war was over, and despite the relatively rapid reconstruction of virtually all-European countries, the housing shortage persisted until the beginning of the 1980s. Moreover, it is still going in most European countries at the beginning of the 21st century. Despite the economic recovery, years of growth, and numerous public and private sector incentives to accelerate housing construction, many Europeans continue to face difficulties finding adequate housing, even if the segments of the population subject to inadequate housing were not the same during the post-war boom years as during thte period immediately after the Second World War. European countries had succeeded in resolving the post-war housing crisis within 10 or 15 years, but since the 1980s, they have failed in providing decent housing to all citizens and immigrants. The housing crisis stands again as a highly pressing problem in Europe, as during the post-war period. Homelessness, slums and even shantytowns have reappeared in or around most European cities, while many "working poor" cannot rent a flat and are sometimes forced to sleep in their cars.

Historiography

Alongside national histories, which are fairly well documented, there are now a relatively large

Bidonville, Villejuif, circa 1970

number of studies of European housing. However, these studies have two particular features.

Firstly, most are sociological works, and therefore most do not cover a long time period. Yet they need to be relied on for longer-term studies. Reference to preceding decades (after the First World War in the 1920s, or during the Great Depression in the 1930s) is needed to understand the causes of the housing crisis and national particularities that explain various specific aspects. Thus, to cite just one general example, the contrast between the housing crisis in France in the 1930s and the relative comfort of German housing during the same era is attributable both to the territorial and political effects of the Treaty of Versailles, and to the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany after 1933.

Secondly, studies of housing have largely focused on social or workers' housing. While the definition varies from one country to the next, "social housing" can be defined, a minima across Europe, as the sector aimed at meeting the needs of more or less underprivileged populations or those that are financially unable to find housing in

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the private market, with full or partial funding via public or quite public loans. It is obvious that this is a major part of the housing question, especially as public policy is a dynamic field for studies in the social sciences. However, on the one hand, social housing can take on other forms, such as the housing built by German labour unions; on the other hand, the housing sector cannot be reduced to social housing alone, or even to the broader subsidised housing sector. The housing sector has specific national features and the level of housing construction varies. Thus, in the early 1950s, housing construction (for all types of housing) was much lower in France than in the UK or Germany.

A European Project

Helsinki, late 1950

With a European team, we decided two years ago to examine the housing issue at a European level. The aim was to study the various ways that Nation-States responded to the housing problem during a specific period – from the division of Europe into two blocs in 1947 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent German reunification. This transnational historical approach is an effective means to understand past solutions and to imagine new answers to the present housing question, as in European cities, housing represents 80% of architectural production and 95% of urban substance. For feasibility reasons, the study covers housing in urban areas or areas undergoing urbanisation during this period of rural exodus and more or less rapid or forced urbanisation of Europeans. Thus, rural housing is only being addressed elliptically in the research.

At the beginning, we wanted to build a European multidisciplinary network of scientists that actually does not yet exist. While national research teams are already working on the history of housing, these teams have not yet been combined to form a "transnational" European network. The scientists involved are generally historians, historians of architecture and urbanism, geographers, sociologists, and political scientists. We hope the network will connect academics and experts: housing policymakers, public-sector representatives, social housing managers, and representatives of resident and tenant associations. They should elaborate a shared vocabulary. An historical approach over the medium term should be required in order to apprehend the long-term processes of common knowledge and the devel-

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opment of shared paradigms for all of Europe, e.g. the difference between private housing and social (public) housing; the choice of detached houses or multidwellings; the debate between homeownership or renting.

The research should be later open to new countries, because the question of providing decent housing for the entire population appears to be raised in quite similar terms all across Europe. In fact, one of the main objectives is to discern transversal questions, a shared vocabulary and an explanatory paradigm that goes beyond national borders, using the tools of connected history. Thus, the research would contribute substantially to the coordination and "defragmentation" of research efforts across Europe and to the strengthening of Europe's scientific networking capacity.

The comparative timelines, focused on the European history of housing that the research aims to clarify, show a convergence of trends that go beyond national differences. These timelines will contribute significantly to understanding European society as a whole, despite the division of the Iron Curtain.

Methodological perspectives

Yet to grasp all the factors that lead to a portion of the population having (or considering itself to have) inadequate housing, all segments of the housing market must be taken into account. This involves considering the production and use of the entire housing supply, from luxury homes to slums, from urban to rural or suburban housing.

Obviously, the research cannot cover all these various elements in great detail, but they will at least be factored into a general project in order to apprehend their respective roles in the systems that regulate the housing sector. Thus, given the role of the Nation-State, the project examines whether the actions of Eastern or Western European States can be understood in "monolithic" terms: to what extent do States harbour internal contradictions, tensions and competing or divergent interests? Are the boundaries between the public and the private sectors explicit and watertight? The research will also review the relationship between the kind of housing decisions made at the national, regional and local levels. Finally, at the lowest level of aggregation, the research will study individual aspirations for the "ideal home", and the way that these are shaped by processes of negotiation and compromise before acquiring a formal political and institutional identity.

Proceeding in this way, the research will address the history of European housing both in terms of "use" and "means". It will ask both how Europeans were housed during the long years of the Cold War, and what the various actors in the market across Europe did to supply a variety of appropriate forms of housing. Nowadays, as Europe is becoming increasingly united, both politically and socially, the need to build a common past grows. This European history of housing will focus on issues that affect all Europeans, and on the role of housing in shaping a specifically European way of life.

This programme promises a way of "lifting back

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the Iron Curtain" on this pressing social question and providing a better understanding of many of the issues that concern all Europeans, namely: the conditions in which the underprivileged or working classes are housed, or urban violence and other problems past and present as destructions and patrimonialization. These issues are shrouded and complicated by the unwillingness of the political process to investigate a painful past. Expertise drawn from the various countries, combining the experience of researchers and the latest findings of those involved in "front-line" empirical enquiry, can frame a clearer understanding of the roots of the housing difficulties facing all European countries.

The project will produce housing studies based on an overall multidisciplinary approach, combining all the following aspects: the relationship between the government and civil society; ties between public policy, the private market and the intermediate sector (which still exists in the former socialist countries); inhabitants' desires, needs and aspirations involving a "nice home"; the social and legal ties between landlords and tenants; and new forms of urban development in the second half of the 20th century. The aim is to integrate the contributions of the various disciplines that study the contemporary city, applied to this question of "total history", from both a top/down and a bottom/up perspective.

We want to examine two strong methodological hypotheses: Eastern Europe, Western Europe and authoritarian Southern Europe must be studied together, without favouring an analysis based on the difference in political systems. This is especially true as during this period, Spain and Portugal went from being economically and politically marginalised to being fully integrated into the European Community. Moreover, the medium-term dimension, beginning after Second World War, is essential for analysing successes and failures.

As history can be viewed as the "pulse" of contemporary societies, the project's main objective is to provide both the scientific community and housing stakeholders (politicians, architects, urban planners, builders) with an historical approach to the housing sector in East and West Europe during the Cold War. When Europe was split into two parts by the Iron Curtain, the needs and desires of Europeans were virtually the same in terms of housing comfort standards, surface area, etc., even though public policies varied by country. Then, as now, the populations to be housed were very diverse: refugees, displaced peoples, the poor, workers and employees, civil servants and even the middle classes. To build this historical view, the research will gather a wide scale transnational statistical database describing the housing crisis and the needs on both sides of the Iron Curtain, but also in Southern Europe under the dictatorships of Franco and Salazar, or even in Tito's Yugoslavia. Until now, apart from some enquiries by CECA and UNO that do not cover the Eastern countries, every country in Europe has had its own approach to evaluating when housing is insufficient and the categories of the population that should be given priority. Therefore, despite some exceptions, it has thus far been almost

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impossible to compare national situations. The European network of social scientists should be able to draft useful criteria for comparison: the number and kind of dwellings built each year, rent levels, individual housing aid enabling poor households to remain solvent, measures encouraging private homeownership, formal architectural choices, the breakdown of terraced houses and detached houses or flats, etc.

In order to assemble a pan-European statistical base and theoretical basis to analyse and compare the European housing situation, the research will associate several disciplines, including history, architecture, political science and sociology, in an interdisciplinary spirit. Each discipline has its own tools to assess standards of comfort, sizes of flats, appropriate floor-space standards for public apartments, how many people can live in small apartments, or the definition of inadequate dwellings endured by so many European households. This also holds true in the case of private enterprises, whether manufacturers of household products or housing developers. Hence the primary objective is to lay a common grounding for the housing field.

We hope, especially in collaboration with partners in Eastern countries, to draw a comparison between parliamentarian and popular democracies in the field of housing and public policies. Comparisons between public policies towards housing in the two, or even three, parts of Europe will cast a light on the types of actors involved and social measures implemented to resolve the crisis. Eastern countries did not have

a single uniform model, and the programme is likely to interest other cooperating states such as Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, or Bulgaria and Romania. A more remote objective is to identify the actors in the "Europeanisation" of contemporary housing history and to explore the roots of a "European way of life" that would be measurable and assessed by all the disciplines involved in the project.

Building databases

The project will contribute to building several databases on housing.

The first phase will involve reviewing and summarising national statistics from across Europe, then interpreting their significance in both national and European terms. While amassing this data, the variety of statistical methods used by various countries to document their housing needs will be compared. Data will be collected for three periods: the aftermath of the war; the 1960s, when rapid population growth was matched with high levels of housing construction; and the 1970s when it was possible, in most of the countries, to think that the housing crisis had been resolved.

The first database will be a kind of chronological equipment. Indeed, despite the wide range of political situations, there is a "shared timeline" in the housing crisis's features. Likewise, there is a shared timeline in the responses of public powers, or in their inability to respond: in spite of the different political situations, Spain under Franco, the United Kingdom, France, or East and

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West Germany, for example, implemented similar public policies because of the lack of housing.

The second database will be more concerned with statistics. We must first draft comparative criteria (e.g. the term "overpopulation" was not defined in the same way in East and West Germany), then to gather a wealth of information in the countries involved in the research and validate and confirm the relevance of these common criteria before completing the database.
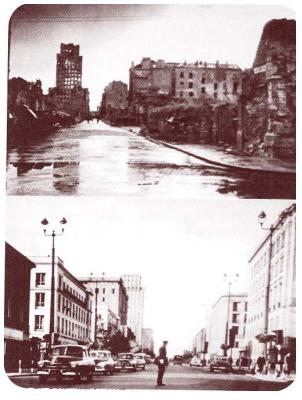
Three periods of time will be examined:

1) the period of evaluating needs amidst the ruins in the aftermath of war, which will highlight national differences (e.g. the disparities between Spain, where wartime destruction occurred before 1939, and Germany, which suffered extensive Allied bombardment beginning in 1943);

2) the expansion period of the 1960s, when all countries experienced strong construction activity along with demographic growth; and

3) the period of the 1970s, when the housing crisis appeared to have been resolved.

With this data available, the team will be able to formulate a series of pan-European issues, identifying networks of influence and how models and techniques were transferred and diffused from one country to the next.

At the same time, a comparative timeline of the history of housing in Europe will be drawn up.

Warsaw, 1956

Warsaw 1945, and below, 1960

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This will bring together the main events: legislation, reports and "white papers" from sector professionals or the government, the construction of buildings that symbolised successive policies, media events, housing crises, and urban social movements. This process of combining research is expected to highlight similarities and differences: Reconstruction after five years of total war, the 1950s, or the age of public policy with the injection of state credits or loans to build millions of new social housing units to overcome the housing crisis. For example, Abbé Froidure and Abbé Pierre's famous appeals in Belgium (1952) and France (1954) triggered a change in public opinion, while the Moscow Conference abandoned Stalinist architecture and imposed Khrushchevian buildings all across Eastern bloc countries in a massive response to the housing shortage. Then, a return to market forces in the 1960s: the quantitative success of public funding policies, together with strong economic growth, led to the idea that the State could forgo direct funding of construction and turn it over to private developer and household incentives by targeted state funds. At the same time, socialist countries failed to house their citizens adequately, except a part of the newly favoured working class or State employees as in Poland.

Transnational questions

Once this corpus of data and comparative timeline are established, transnational questions – i.e. those that are pertinent in the various nation-states – will be (re) formulated. We will seek to identify the systems of influence, transfer and diffusion for models and techniques, while asking questions that appear to be relevant for all the countries under consideration.

Among these questions, four have already been identified:

1: Property-developers: public policy, private-sector construction, and the "intermediate sector".

Public construction is the segment most familiar to historians, for which there are a large number of national studies. Hence the research will immediately emphasise a comparison of public policies in terms of housing in the various countries, the respective contributions of public builders and private entrepreneurs in housing construction, without forgetting this "intermediate sector" – in France, the subsidised sector – that incorporates public funding and private efforts. In doing so, self-build homes (the "Castor" movement in France, self-helped housing, family building, the cooperative societies in Poland, the German trade unions, etc.) will not be neglected. This question of the relationship between the public and private sectors also applies in socialist countries and authoritarian states. For instance, in Poland, a large cooperative sector continued to exist, preventing the socialist regime from fully controlling the building sector.

This question involves comparing public-sector policy and private-sector strategy with the financing modes in each country in order to identify models: public-sector domination, on either a national level (e.g. in France) or a local one (e.g.

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the UK), or conversely the supremacy of private-sector initiative (e.g. in Italy), to build a nation of homeowners (e.g. in Spain) or eventually abolish private homeownership (e.g. socialist countries in Eastern Europe).

2: Multi-dwellings vs. detached houses.

The period chosen is characterised by the construction of new multi-dwellings, on a scale never seen before in the European urban landscape: grands ensembles in France, large housing estates in the UK, borgate in Italy, collective dwellings in all socialist countries. However, this trend did not curtail (or prevent, depending on the country) urban sprawl or tract housing. How was the proportion of multi-dwellings vs. detached homes determined? Does this breakdown mirror that of owner-occupiers and renters? This question prompts a study of inhabitants' aspirations and of the countries mainly comprised of home-owners (e.g. Spain), contrasted with those mainly comprised of renters (e.g. France). If it is possible to grasp the housing aspirations of populations from an historical perspective, did these aspirations evolve over time, between the periods of reconstruction, expansion, and the return of economic crisis?

The research will cover the choice between multi-dwellings and detached houses, or the combined question of urban development types and residents' preferences. In post-war Europe, a new type of housing was developed: social housing estates comprised of blocks of high-rises; the extent of such developments varied considerably depending on the country. Did technical and financial systems impose this new type of housing on Europeans who would have preferred individual housing in the form of private homes?

3: What is a "housing crisis"?

How are these crises analysed, quantified and perceived? Does the term "housing crisis" have the same meaning for all Europeans, in Eastern and Western Europe? When do housing crises appear? The research will draw up comparative national timelines, showing possible variations in public perception of the peaks of crisis and seeking to connect these with political changes within each Nation State. The crisis and its perception do not appear with the same intensity or at the same time in every country (for instance, in France, the peak of the crisis in public opinion was in 1954, whereas it was ten years later in Italy).

This part will cover a central question that unifies all the data at key moments in the history of housing in each country. What is a housing crisis, or more specifically, to what degree is an urbanised society, at a given point in its development, prepared to tolerate indecent housing? The question can be formulated in a more brutal fashion: Which social categories did Europeans accept to see living or even dying in the streets, for lack of a roof over their heads, in 1950, 1970 and 1980?

A fourth historical question, transnational from the outset, will be addressed by examining the attempts to harmonise housing policy and standards for "decent housing" on a European level,

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within the framework of international organisations such as CECA, UNESCO, the EU, COMECON or the European Council (standard bodies). Case Studies (monographs) on the housing experiences of Europeans during this period, e.g. emergency temporary housing, multi-household housing, shared collective apartments, flat rentals in large social housing complexes, or building homes with self-helped housing, will be considered as a supplement in order to obtain a concrete view of this European history of lifestyles. This part will examine policies for European harmonisation of housing standards during the Cold War within international organisations.

At the end of this research process, we hope to get some responses to major questions. For example, how were Europeans housed during the period when Europe was divided into several political systems? Or, should we regard the nation-state frame of reference as obsolete or inadequate for analysing the shared destiny of European households? To be sure, the experiences of all European countries were conditioned, albeit not always at the same time, by the main trends of postwar mass housing:

- overcoming wartime ruins and precarious housing;

- entering the period of mass housing (financed to a greater or lesser extent by the public sector);

- the presumed end of the housing crisis with the prosperous 1960s;

- and finally the renewed crises of the late 1970s/1980s, with new imperatives: housing immigrants, or meeting new needs in terms of housing standards in the socialist and authoritarian countries.