What about families, housing and property wealth in a neoliberal world?

Editors' response to reviewers

Ronald, R.; Arundel, R.

DOI
10.1080/19491247.2023.2275403

Publication date
2023

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
International Journal of Housing Policy

License
CC BY-NC-ND

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

International Journal of Housing Policy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/reuj20

What about families, housing and property wealth in a neoliberal world?

Editors' response to reviewers

Richard Ronald & Rowan Arundel

To cite this article: Richard Ronald & Rowan Arundel (2023) What about families, housing and property wealth in a neoliberal world?, International Journal of Housing Policy, 23:4, 847-854, DOI: 10.1080/19491247.2023.2275403

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2023.2275403

Published online: 28 Nov 2023.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOUSING POLICY
2023, VOL. 23, NO. 4, 847–854
https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2023.2275403

What about families, housing and property wealth in a neoliberal world?

Editors' response to reviewers

Richard Ronald and Rowan Arundel

Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Why families, housing, and the economy?

One of the more unexpected features of social and economic realignment in the twenty-first century has been the reactivation of the family. Families had faded away in analyses of late capitalist societies with their functions assumed to have been replaced by either the state or the market, and their role often reduced to biological reproduction and the service of emotional needs (Popenhoe, 1993). The advance of economic liberalism required, or so it was supposed, an ethic of individualism operating in and through the logic of the market. However, far from fading, in the years leading up to and since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the family became ever more critical to the welfare and life chances of individuals. Families not only stepped in as a buffer against the economic volatility of the GFC and Great Recession that followed (and later the global pandemic), they also, increasingly, became units of economic organisation and activity, especially in the domain of housing. This was a central departure point for our edited book, *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*.

Economic restructuring since the turn of the century has been increasingly geared around real estate and housing commodification as a mode of wealth accumulation. While mortgage securitisation was a driver of global economic restructuring before 2008, in the aftermath of the GFC, unprecedented local and cross-national flows of investment into housing drove extraordinary property-price and rent increases. In understanding this process, considerable attention has been given to the role of large financial entities, including banks, hedge funds and private equity firms as well as the broader role of financialisation and digitalisation in transforming economies (Wijburg et al., 2018; Beswick et al., 2016; Fields & Rogers, 2021). However, families have been a critical plank of housing

CONTACT Richard Ronald r.ronald@uva.nl

market transformations and particularly effective in mobilising their resources towards the acquisition of property.

Housing has not just been a solid asset investment but also a critical means of support among family members (Cook, 2021; Druta & Ronald, 2017; Manzo et al., 2019). It has gained increasing salience, especially among better-resourced families, as a means to generate extra income from rents with remarkable growth in multiple property ownership and small scale rentierism (Aalbers et al., 2021; Kadi et al., 2020). Thus, although neoliberal conceptions of housing sector transformations focus on corporate actors, adaptations of family and kinship networks have been enormously influential. Indeed, families have not only reasserted themselves as a collective base for the fulfilment of housing needs and as a buffer against social and economic turbulence, but also as instruments that enhance capacities to accumulate real estate wealth under conditions of late capitalism (Adkins et al., 2021; Forrest & Hirayama, 2018). At the same time, differences between families in terms of housing tenure and relative market position have become particularly significant drivers of inequality and social polarisation (Arundel, 2017, Dewilde & Flynn, 2021). In this vein, housing inequalities are, increasingly, not merely a reflection of individual socio-economic position, but crucially determined by the resources of parental and extended family networks.

Our book explores these intersecting transformations of families, housing and the economy, drawing upon illustrative research across various empirical cases (Ronald & Arundel, 2023). We explicitly pick up from Forrest and Murie's (1995) analysis of the widespread expansion of homeownership in the late-twentieth century and the role of housing privatisation and rising property values in sustaining economic growth during this era. This, they argue, significantly augmented the overall impact of housing in social and economic relations, and in particular, the relationship between families and the economy that facilitated a hollowing out of the welfare state. Our analysis, however, reflects on an even more intense stage of economic (neo)liberalism that followed which has seemingly amplified these dynamics. This period has been specifically shaped by a global housing boom at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession that followed, and subsequent era of unequal economic recovery. The latter has featured falling rather than rising homeownership rates, declining housing affordability, heavier concentrations of housing wealth among older and middle-class property owners as well as greater differentiation between households based on kinship and intergenerational ties.

Response to reviews

The reviewers in this forum have provided particularly useful observations on our book's contributions to current debates on housing and the current era. We engage below with several core points that the reviewers raise.

Firstly, reviews by Laura James and Rory Coulter both emphasise the importance of our book in articulating sensitivity to *families*, rather than *households* and *individuals*, as the centre of housing and economic practices. Families and households have largely been treated interchangeably in housing research, ignoring affective interconnections across households that are often as strong as those within. Admittedly, while making this important conceptual shift in emphasis, our volume primarily focuses on stem family relations and does not fully address variation in composition, or *what counts as family*, as thoroughly as it could. Nancy Worth makes a number of critical observations in this regard, identifying considerable diversity in the meaning and composition of the 'family'. Family ties allude to blended and stepfamilies, queer families and families of choice, where intergenerational expectations and obligations to kin can become complex or blurred, especially in regard to inheritance, community property, childcare/custody etc. Similarly, we appreciate that there are considerable differences in the resources some families have available to support each other as well as cultural and individual variation in how emotional ties are expressed or manifest.

Secondly, *where families live*, as Worth emphasises, is also important. We can consider 'where' at different levels, and in our volume, we provide substantial geographic variation albeit recognising some Anglophone bias with chapters empirically focused on Ireland (Waldron, 2023), the UK (Burrows, 2022; Rowlingson et al., 2023) and Australia (Ma et al., 2023), but also Czechia (Lux et al., 2023). There are also direct cross-national comparisons made at the European scale, that are both quantitative (Flynn & Schwartz, 2023) and qualitative (Druta, 2023) in nature. Our book thus reflects on how different policy regimes and housing systems impact family choices and experiences in a variety of contexts. As James recognises, it tries to be sensitive to contextual diversity by covering different family and generational relations across a group of representative countries, although it is clearly not (and does not aim to be) comparatively systematic or comprehensive.

In considering the 'where', nonetheless, there are other original insights in our book, such as the chapter on foreign real estate investment (Ma et al., 2023). Here, the authors address how social, economic and political conditions in one country, China, interact with those of another, Australia, through families and housing. In this case, the strategies adopted by Chinese parents buying property for their children attending university in Australia reflect the centrality of housing in how families in China mobilise cultural and economic capitals transnationally. At the same time, such practices impact on urban Australian housing markets and thus family housing wealth strategies and intergenerational dynamics there.

The 'where' of housing also implies spatial variation within each country and diversity in the types of homes and tenures that families occupy. There is a tendency to visualise family housing in terms of detached, owner-occupied suburban dwellings. However, this is clearly not representative or even typical, especially outside North America. Our book assumes a range of housing stock types in each of the countries addressed, but often centres on housing assets in understanding policy and market contexts, and family behaviour. This reflects our concern with intergenerational inequalities and the growing orientation of family relations around an 'asset economy', 'privatised Keynesianism' and 'asset-based welfare' (Adkins et al., 2021; Crouch, 2009; Doling & Ronald, 2010). The book is, nonetheless, much broader in scope and, as Coulter points out, moves well beyond owner-occupation. The Chapter by Waldron (2023) on Ireland, for example, addresses rising precarity of both renting and low-income homeowning families alongside the importance of regional variation.

Thirdly, the reviewers variously allude to the role of housing in shaping contemporary socioeconomic *inequalities,* especially those emerging between generations resulting from historic shifts in housing conditions. Intergenerational dynamics at both macro-social and micro-familial levels are explored in depth throughout our book.

In contrast to the 'spread of personal wealth' promised by the swell of households buying their own homes in the twentieth century (Forrest & Murie, 1995, p. 2), housing markets are now significantly enhancing economic inequalities between social classes as well as older and younger birth cohorts (Arundel & Ronald, 2021; Christophers, 2021). These inequalities are reshaping macro level tensions between the generations, with housing-poor younger cohorts increasingly excluded from an unaffordable and constrained housing market, while older cohorts were often advantaged by historic house price inflation—with many older households further deriving income by renting to younger-adults excluded from owner-occupied housing. While the macro view is of *generations at odds with each other*, at the level of family relationships, older generations are being called upon to support the housing careers of their own offspring who have become increasingly dependent upon the housing assets and other resources of their parents. In this sense, intergenerational inequalities are also *bringing generations and families together.* Moreover, as the distribution of housing wealth across older cohorts is highly uneven (Arundel & Doling, 2017), inheritance and inter-vivo transfers are further reproducing and potentially intensifying established social class divisions across generations. Families have thus been critical to the growth of both inter- and intragenerational economic inequality in the twenty-first century.

Fourthly, as the analysis of inequality above illustrates, family and housing practices are not passive subjects of contemporary neoliberal realignment. Transformations in housing systems and families are, as Coulter notes, *interwoven processes* with far reaching social and economic consequences. For example, with poor housing affordability and diminishing expectations of buying a home, many young people are delaying the formation of new families or even residential independence and coupling. Housing conditions—especially in contexts where owner-occupation has been normalised as the basis of adult identities—are thus contributing to diminishing fertility and disrupting transitions through the life course. Similarly, while growth in one-person households continues to advance, the number of single people *house sharing* has recently seen a rapid expansion (Druta et al., 2021; Maalsen, 2020). Demand for shared housing has been transformative, especially in urban markets, leading a shift towards the provision of commercial, shared lets (co-living complexes) and transformations of family units into houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs). Shifts in housing conditions, thus, do not just affect families. Family disruptions have remarkable demographic and economic outcomes and deeply impact cities and the built environment.

Conclusions

Families, housing and the economy, as we argue in our book, are deeply integrated and their interaction is fundamental to understanding recent socioeconomic realignments. While financialisation has been the focus of analyses of housing in social and economic transformations, with attention centred on large global corporations, cross-national capital flows and the will of powerful neoliberal actors, the change we have experienced over the last quarter century has also been generated by a re-alignment of, and among families. In the face of state retrenchment and market vicissitudes, families have increasingly mobilised their collective resources around housing. Our book therefore alludes to the emerging position of families and their orientation towards their homes in a changing and more 'neoliberal world'. Though the notion of 'neoliberalism' is often used somewhat casually to emphasise particular features of late-capitalism, there are particular saliences vis-à-vis families. A key one is that neoliberal subjects, rather than independent, self-serving individuals, are increasingly reliant on their collective and affective associations with other kin. Housing has played a particular role in destabilising social and economic conditions, but also as a resource that families can marshal in order to reassert more stability for their members. Families then, have been a powerful antidote to the inequalities generated by neoliberal capitalism.

However, while networks of kin typically use their housing resources to resolve inequalities within their ranks, inequalities between families have been exacerbated by housing market conditions. Indeed, the uneven distribution of property wealth—enhanced by privatised familialism—has become a critical driver of socioeconomic polarisation more or less universally. This lies in contradiction to the slogans of an early neoliberal age, which alluded to, à la Margaret Thatcher, the privatisation of housing as a means to enhance meritocracy, improve welfare overall and 'democratise wealth'.

We are very thankful to the reviewers as well as the editors of this journal for platforming our book and engaging so generously with its

contribution and aims. Our hope is that it helps reframe current debates on housing around the family, but also understanding of current social and economic developments more broadly.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Richard Ronald http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3263-8204
Rowan Arundel http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2518-2923

References

Adkins, L., Cooper, M., & Konings, M. (2021). Class in the 21st century: Asset inflation and the new logic of inequality. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *53*(3), 548–572. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X19873673

Arundel, R. (2017). Equity inequity: Housing wealth inequality, inter and intra-generational divergences, and the rise of private landlordism. *Housing, Theory and Society*, *34*(2), 176–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2017.1284154

Arundel, R., & Doling, J. (2017). The end of mass homeownership? Changes in labour markets and housing tenure opportunities across Europe. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment: HBE*, *32*(4), 649–672. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-017-9551-8

Arundel, R., & Ronald, R. (2021). The false promise of homeownership: Homeowner societies in an era of declining access and rising inequality. *Urban Studies*, *58*(6), 1120–1140. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019895227

Beswick, J., Alexandri, G., Byrne, M., Vives-Miró, S., Fields, D., Hodkinson, S., & Janoschka, M. (2016). Speculating on London's housing future. *City*, *20*(2), 321–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2016.1145946

Aalbers, M.B., Hochstenbach, C., Bosma, J., & Fernandez, R. (2021). The Death and Life of Private Landlordism: How Financialized Homeownership Gave Birth to the Buy-To-Let Market. *Housing, Theory and Society*, *38*(5), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2020.1846610

Burrows, V. (2022). Families, housing and economic security. In R. Ronald, & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. Routledge.

Christophers, B. (2021). A tale of two inequalities: Housing-wealth inequality and tenure inequality. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *53*(3), 573–594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X19876946

Cook, J. (2021). Keeping it in the family: Understanding the negotiation of intergenerational transfers for entry into homeownership. *Housing Studies*, *36*(8), 1193–1211. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1754347

Crouch, C. (2009). Privatised Keynesianism: An unacknowledged policy regime. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *11*(3), 382–399. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2009.00377.x

Dewilde, C., & Flynn, L.B. (2021). Post-crisis developments in young adults' housing wealth. *Journal of European Social Policy*, *31*(5), 580–596. https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211040443

Doling, J., & Ronald, R. (2010). Home ownership and asset-based welfare. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, *25*(2), 165–173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-009-9177-6

Druta, O. (2023). Family Debts and Intergenerational Giving. In R. Ronald & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. Routledge.

Druta, O., & Ronald, R. (2017). Young adults' pathways into home ownership and the negotiation of intra-family support: A home, the ideal gift. *Sociology*, *51*(4), 783–799. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516629900

Druta, O., Ronald, R., & Heath, S. (2021). Urban singles and shared housing. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *22*(9), 1195–1203. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1987507

Fields, D., & Rogers, D. (2021). Towards a critical housing studies research agenda on platform real estate. *Housing, Theory and Society*, *38*(1), 72–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2019.1670724

Flynn, L.B., & Schwartz, H.M. (2023). Welfare States, Housing Markets and Millennials. In R. Ronald & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. Routledge.

Forrest, R., & Hirayama, Y. (2018). Late home ownership and social re-stratification. *Economy and Society*, *47*(2), 257–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2018.1459368

Forrest, R., & Murie, A. (1995). From privatization to commodification: Tenure conversion and new zones of transition in the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *19*(3), 407–422. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1995.tb00517.x

Kadi, J., Hochstenbach, C., & Lennartz, C. (2020). Multiple property ownership in times of late homeownership: A new conceptual vocabulary. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, *20*(1), 6–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2019.1697514

Lux, M., Sunega, P., & Kazmer, L. (2023). Families and the Reproduction of Homeownership in a Post-Socialist Context. In R. Ronald & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. London.

Ma, X., Rogers, D., Nelson, J., & Wang, Y. (2023). Foreign Real Estate Investment and International Education as a Family Wealth Strategy. In R. Ronald & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. London.

Maalsen, S. (2020). 'Generation Share': digitalized geographies of shared housing. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *21*(1), 105–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1466355

Manzo, L. K., Druta, O., & Ronald, R. (2019). Supported Home Ownership and Adult Independence in Milan: The Gilded Cage of Family Housing Gifts and Transfers. *Sociology*, *53*(3), 519–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518798761

Popenhoe, D. (1993). American family decline, 1960-1990: A review and appraisal. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *55*, 527–555.

Ronald, R., & Arundel, R. (Eds.) (2023). *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. London.

Rowlingson, K., Overton, L., & Cook, J. (2023). Housing and Intergenerational Relations. In R. Ronald & R. Arundel (Eds.), *Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. Routledge.

Waldron, R. (2023). Families and Housing Precarity in Post-Crisis' Ireland. In R. Ronald &R. Arundel (Eds.), *Post-Crisis' Ireland. In Families, Housing and Property Wealth in a Neoliberal World*. London.

Wijburg, G., Aalbers, M.B., & Heeg, S. (2018). The financialization of rental housing 2.0: Releasing housing into the privatized mainstream of accumulation. *Antipode*, *50*(4), 1098–1119. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12382