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EDITORIAL

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Housing as an engine of inequality and the role of policy

Introduction

Housing is not only an outcome but also an engine of socio-economic inequality. In many cities across the world, there are weekly headlines about the 'housing crisis'—our home countries Australia, the Netherlands and the UK being no exception. In Australia, renters report stories of having to frequently move further away from jobs and schools to find more affordable accommodation. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, even once affordable regional towns no longer offer much relief from rising rents. An increasing cohort of young adults is facing renting for life, a precarious housing future characterised by very little security and stability over lease length or rent increases. In the Netherlands, late 2021 saw the largest housing protests take place since the 1980s, with tens of thousands of people, many of them young adults, taking the streets in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and other cities. These protests highlighted the wide range of housing problems: from rapidly increasing levels of homelessness and parental co-residence, to growing social divides between owners and renters. Housing has remained high on the public and political agenda ever since. In the UK, policy-makers continue to tout homeownership as a preferred tenure of choice, despite mounting difficulties for many to access the tenure, particularly in London. Renting privately for longer periods of your life has become the 'new normal', especially for younger people without significant savings and parental support. While highly precarious and unaffordable, private renting often remains the only available alternative in a housing system with highly inaccessible homeownership and a severe shortage of social rental housing. This process of rising precarity among the 'housing-have-nots' contrasts sharply with an accelerated accumulation of property wealth and rental income among the 'housing-haves'.

Recent years have seen a steep increase in studies, also published in the pages of *International Journal of Housing Policy*, seeking to chart and theorise such housing-based inequalities. These studies pay ample attention to homeowners' wealth accumulation prospects, with many homes – particularly those located in the centres of popular cities– recording house price increases exceeding the annual salaries of middle-income workers.

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Or, simply put, these homes have come to 'earn more than jobs' (Ryan-Collins & Murray, 2023). Rocketing house prices help generate stark wealth divides between homeowners and tenants, who are excluded from these capital gains (Pfeffer & Waitkus, 2021), as well as other outsiders such as young adults who see no option but to prolong their stay in the parental home. A further stratification exists among homeowners, between heavily mortgaged, equity poor homeowners and the (sometimes outright) owners of valuable property in coveted locations seeing the values of their properties inflate.

The reconcentration of property among the affluent sets the scene for both increased inequalities in terms of wealth accumulation, and increased rent extraction from (typically, relatively poor) renters to (rather affluent) rentiers. Housing wealth is highly unequally distributed within societies, regardless of the fact that this is even more so the case for other asset classes such as shares or obligations (Smith, 2008). To illustrate, in 2017, the top 10% richest households in Australia, the United States, and United Kingdom held 45%, 53% and 39% of total net housing wealth, respectively (Smith et al., 2022). In the Netherlands (Hochstenbach & Aalbers, 2024), the top 10% similarly held 40% of net housing wealth, with the bottom half of the population owning nothing (mostly renters) or finding themselves in net mortgage debt (such as marginal owners). In addition to unequal wealth accumulation, disparities in housing costs also contribute towards inequalities in income (i.e., after subtracting housing-related expenses) and purchasing power, and increasingly so (Dustmann et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). Whereas rental housing affordability has deteriorated across higher-income countries, this has not been the case for many owner-occupiers (Hick et al., 2024).

Wealth inequality is highly persistent, not in the least because wealth can be handed down across generations. Housing, of course, is a key field where the intergenerational transmission of wealth takes place, e.g., as parents increasingly provide financial assistance for their children to purchase a home. Recent evidence from the UK suggests that in 2020 more than half of all first-time buyers were dependent on parental support—ranging from helping with the deposit to gifting the entire property. In 2005, this share stood at less than 30%, and in the 1980s was lower still at around 20% (Coggan, 2024). Interestingly, despite an emphasis on individualised responsibility, this trend points to a growing reliance on 'kinship, reciprocity and family exchange networks' (Ronald & Arundel, 2023, p. 15) which amplifies inequalities *within* generations based on parental resources (Howard, 2024).

Increases in multiple property ownership (Kadi et al., 2020) have further fed the advance of housing as a rent-generating asset, e.g., through buy-to-let investments and private landlordism more broadly. Colloquially, such investments are typically driven by aspirations of generating 'passive income' through strategically getting hold of in-demand rental housing. Scholars have conceptualised this as part of 'rentier capitalism' (Christophers,

2021) or 'assetization' (Birch & Ward, 2024; Langley, 2021). Both concepts, essentially, centre not so much the trading of—in this case—housing, but rather the possession of housing as a scarce and secure rent-generating asset.

These developments have triggered new and important scholarly work on housing as a basis for class formation, reinvigorating earlier debates around 'housing classes'. This new literature does not stand on its own, but should be considered in relation to other studies that see housing as the basis of a score of socio-economic and other inequalities. In this editorial, we first briefly discuss how this reinvigorated literature informs contemporary thinking on housing and inequality. Then, we outline how the *International Journal of Housing Policy* can make important contributions to these ongoing debates.

Housing classes: property ownership as a determinant of inequalities

The concept of housing classes was initially formulated in the 1960s by Rex and Moore (1967) and the subject of lively debates during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Dunleavy, 1979; Saunders, 1978, 1984). At its core, the concept of housing classes argues that housing is not only a product of class but also a basis for class formation, i.e., the process in which class groups are delineated and (re)produced. These arguments ascribe an important role to tenure, particularly owning and renting. Critics of the housing classes idea countered that class formation remained primarily routed in labour. They questioned the extent to which housing can generate market returns, for example for homeowners for whom house-price inflation mostly represents a 'paper reality'. Furthermore, they saw home-ownership as too broad a class category, lumping together populations with different social positions and interests (see Ruonavaara, 2024 for a more elaborate recap of these debates). Subsequently, for a time, the concept of housing classes lost traction in the field of housing studies.

Recent years have, however, seen a revival of the concept, perhaps most forcefully proposed by Lisa Adkins, Melinda Cooper and Martijn Konings in their work on the 'asset economy' (Adkins et al., 2020, 2021). In it, Adkins and colleagues argue that in the tandem dynamics of wage stagnation and unprecedented house-price inflation, it is house price inflation that takes greatest precedence in determining economic outcomes today. Or, in their words, 'it is the relationship to assets rather than employment that operates as the key decider and distributor of life chances' (Adkins et al., 2021, p. 567). The authors thus see assets replacing employment as the primary determinant of class position. Following from this, Adkins and colleagues have drawn up an asset-based class scheme in which class groups are delineated based on individual's housing assets and their ability to build equity and/or generate rental returns from these. Their class scheme runs from rentiers at the top, i.e., those owning multiple

properties to accumulate wealth and capture rents, to unmortgaged and mortgaged homeowners in the middle, and those without assets (renters) or any housing at all (people experiencing homelessness) at the bottom (for a critical appraisal, see Christophers, 2021).

Other scholars have similarly proposed housing-based class schemes, such as Forrest and Hirayama (2018) who add a familial dimension that distinguished between 'accumulating families' and 'dissipating families.' In doing so, they highlight the crucial generational dimension tied to the intergenerational reproduction of property ownership. In his book *The Tenant Class,* Ricardo Tranjan (2023) makes the argument that tenants represent a social class, shaped by shared experiences of exploitative landlord-tenant relations but crucially also by class organising around common tenant interests and collective struggles to combat landlord political power, who certainly also share distinct class positions and interests (Hochstenbach, 2022; Kerrigan, 2024). This work underscores that housing position can indeed be a basis for shared class interests and thus action.

In a recent sociological contribution, Nora Waitkus, Mike Savage and Maren Toft (2024) added to these debates by offering a broader perspective on the position of wealth in Marxist, Weberian and Bourdieusian class schemes. Their contribution does not focus on housing wealth *per se*, but they do pay attention to the particularly important position of housing in wealth-based inequalities and class stratification. Indeed, for many middle and upper-middle class households, housing is by far the most important source of wealth (and debt). Even if Waitkus and colleagues are cautious about ascribing a primary role to wealth in class stratification—as Adkins and colleagues do—they do agree that contemporary class analysis needs to take serious the role of 'capital, capital accumulation, and financial markets' (Waitkus et al., 2024, p. 3 citing Therborn, 2002, p. 223). A contemporary class analysis, they argue, simply cannot ignore wealth stratification.

Notwithstanding enduring criticisms and debate surrounding housing class theories (see Ruonavaara, 2024), the concept's re-emergence reflects the need to understand and conceptualise how housing increasingly functions as an engine of inequality. Housing can massively amplify even minor economic differences between households, and these inequalities can subsequently be transferred across generations. The ability, decision, timing and location of house purchase can put households with similar incomes on highly divergent wealth accumulation trajectories that, over time, forge insurmountable wealth gaps between these households.

Housing precarity: residential conditions as a basis for inequalities

The literature on housing classes thus directs most attention to the *economic* dimension of class stratification and to *property owners* and their

capacity to generate market returns (i.e., capital gains and/or rent). Conversely, other literatures home in on a wider array of social inequalities rooted in housing and, in doing so, they typically zoom in on the 'centrality of housing for the urban poor' (Desmond, 2018, p. 168), shifting attention from one extreme to the other, from the property-rich to the property-poor. For the property poor, academics have long conceptualised housing as a potentially important source of precarity. Crucially, the concept of precarity moves beyond opportunity to generate market returns from one's home, or lack thereof, to instead focus on a broader range of potential disadvantages impacting the precariously housed. Those disadvantages represent types of *residential precarities* that include, for instance, disproportionally high housing cost burdens relative to their incomes, short-term and insecure rental contracts, weak tenant protections overall, substandard dwelling quality and overcrowding (Clair et al., 2019; DeLuca & Rosen, 2022). Even if these precarities disproportionally impact renters, they certainly do not impact *all* renters, let alone equally so. Likewise, marginalised homeowners may also be confronted with specific precarities, such as problematic debt levels, risks of mortgage defaults and evictions that may follow.

While residential precarity may be considered problematic in itself, it has potential consequences cutting across various domains (Zavisca & Gerber, 2016). It is beyond the scope of this editorial to discuss at length these different domains, but they for example pertain to life course, health, politics and geography. In terms of life course, housing disadvantage can frustrate key life-course transitions such as home-leaving and family formation. Housing furthermore has a profound impact on both physical and mental health (Swope & Hernández, 2019), through the combination of its material (e.g., quality), legal (e.g., tenure) and affective dimensions (e.g., feeling at home). In terms of politics, it has been widely documented that housing tenure and prices impact political preferences, e.g., for more or less redistribution, as well as political participation (Ansell, 2019). Housing inequalities will also translate into spatial inequalities, reproducing spatial segregation and relegating marginalised populations to poorly serviced or stigmatised neighbourhoods (Musterd et al., 2017).

It is important to conceive of these housing-based precarities not as isolated issues, but as relational outcomes. They are inextricably linked to the benefits enjoyed by others, specifically the property owning classes. This is most evident in the case of rental relations, where high and increasing housing-cost burdens among (typically lower income) tenants directly feed into income generation and wealth accumulation among (typically more affluent) landlords. More indirectly, the political preferences of homeowners, who in many countries constitute an electoral majority, structure a housing politics that promotes and stimulates homeownership in different ways, while undermining affordable rental alternatives through austerity and liberalisation.

As these select examples of housing precarity's fallout illustrate, housing works as an engine of inequality, and its mechanical dynamics are not purely economic (rent, capital gains) as emphasised in the housing classes literature, and nor do they function through property ownership alone. Moreover, housing appears to have a domino function, encouraging inequalities in one domain (e.g., socio-economic) to cascade into inequalities in other domains (e.g., health, employment, political participation, spatial opportunity). To give an example, existing economic inequalities structure who can afford and gain access to which types of housing. The typical outcome, particularly in commodified housing markets where social sorting is largely determined by market power, is that lower socio-economic groups are restricted to lower quality, less environmentally sound housing with worse access to jobs, services and amenities, which can have profound repercussions for both physical and mental health.

Recognising the political-economic and policy context

The *International Journal of Housing Policy* is well-positioned to intervene in debates on the housing-inequalities nexus by foregrounding the role of housing policy, housing systems and housing institutions and promoting critical reflection. In doing so, we advocate for a stronger focus on two key, interrelated, dynamics of housing-generated inequalities: (1) the role of state narratives and policies, and (2) wider context dependency related to housing systems.

The first focuses on the role of policy in making housing into an engine of inequality. Such a perspective crucially reveals that housing-driven inequalities or class demarcations are conditional on institutional arrangements and state policies. Discussing capital accumulation *via* housing, Fernandez and Aalbers (2017, p. 156) speak of 'inherently politically enabled constructions' that have allowed house prices to increase at a faster rate than incomes, amplifying the returns on assets vis-à-vis employment. States have long endorsed and facilitated housing wealth accumulation, e.g., through favourable tax schemes and fiscal regimes for property owners, as well as through enabling the steady flow of mortgage credit as fuel to boost house prices (Ryan-Collins, 2021). In case of a housing-market downturn, political pressures to introduce policy measures that 'get the market going again'—boosting housing exchange transactions and, in turn, price rises—are paramount. Such policies do not stand on their own but are part of an enduring ideological project that casts homeownership as the superior tenure form (Ronald, 2008) and considers housing-based wealth accumulation as a viable, privatised alternative to welfare state provisions (Doling & Ronald, 2010; Kemeny, 2005; Nethercote, 2019).

State institutions have also played a foundational role in making rental housing an appealing asset class and integrating it in capital flows, alongside other drivers. State interventions in this regard include, for example, rental deregulation, landlord favouring, weakened tenant protections, and

providing rental-housing investors with financial (tax) incentives. These have helped remove barriers for generating rents and enhanced appetite for investments in rental property, both existing (buy-to-let) and new build (build-to-rent). The key role of state policies is furthermore illustrated by a more recent shift towards re-regulation of rental markets, e.g., as evidenced by a notable 'renaissance of rent control' across countries, following a longer-term trend of deregulation (Kholodilin & Kohl, 2023, p. 672; also see Kadi et al., 2021). Along with rising interest rates, such measures have restricted returns on rental housing, contributing to a slump in buy-to-let purchases and triggering landlords to offload rental property. Such examples clearly demonstrate how housing policies have a direct and substantial impact on the extent to which housing facilitates rent extraction and wealth accumulation, and thus also its position as the foundation for housing-based or asset-based class schemes. Through the journal's focus on housing policies, *IJHP* is well positioned to tease out how and to what extent these policies, as part of broader of housing systems and welfare state institutions, generate the conditions for housing to serve as foundational to class.

A second focus in analysing housing-based inequalities is context dependency. Welfare regimes and housing systems crucially shape housing-based inequalities, as well as housing class schemes. Of particular relevance here are the 'varieties of residential capitalism' as outlined by Schwartz and Seabrooke (2008). In their analysis, they categorise countries based on levels of owner-occupation and degrees of mortgage debt relative to GDP. The former is a proxy for levels of housing-market commodification, while the latter indicates whether housing finance is more liberalised (higher levels of debt) or more controlled (lower levels of debt). Their subsequent argument is that these housing-tenure and housing-finance structures condition 'political behaviour, social stability, the structure of welfare states, and macro-economic outcomes' (Schwartz & Seabrooke, 2008, p. 237). They also discuss how these structures factor into residential property wealth accumulation, particularly among the more affluent. In so doing they sketch out the basic premise of asset-based class schemes, while also crucially suggesting that such class schemes may be of more relevance in some countries than in others. For example, Wind and Dewilde (2019) found that welfare policies and housing regimes play a crucial role in shaping the width of the 'tenure wealth gap', even if results are complex. They found the greatest wealth gaps between tenures in traditionally familial housing systems, where homeownership is reproduced across generations and tenant protections are weak. Wealth gaps are somewhat smaller in more financialised regimes, although mainly due to the large mortgage debts associated with homeownership. The smallest gaps were to be found in countries with larger de-commodified rental sectors, improving tenants' financial position and purchasing power. Such a contextual and comparative perspective on housing, assets and class is as of yet lacking though, with experiences from Anglophone countries dominating

the debate. Indeed, Adkins et al. (2021) distil their asset-based class scheme from the Australian experience, and in particular from Sydney, a context that boasts some of the highest relative mortgage debts in the world, high homeownership rates and an entirely residual social-rental system. The focus of *IJHP* on housing institutions lends itself to comparative approaches, which can contribute to contextually-sensitive assessments of housing, class and social inequality.

With this in mind, we hope that *IJHP* can continue to constitute a major forum for debate around housing and inequalities in the years ahead. There seems no indication that the factors driving such inequalities in recent decades are to be dramatically reversed anytime soon, even if policies are shifting. Hence, inequality will remain a major focus for the housing studies community and hopefully also for authors considering submitting their papers to this journal.

The papers in this issue

The papers in this issue bring to light a myriad of ways in which housing inequalities exist and are experienced. Much of this is related to the different experiences of housing agency, quality and security dependent on tenure and ownership type. Many of these articles not just illuminate the way housing inequality is experienced, but also how the different values attributed to housing, as a home or an asset, mediate these experiences.

Landlord, tenant and ownership relations

McKee and Harris (2023) draw inspiration from Rex and Moore (1967) sociological analysis to understand the dynamics and uneven experiences of tenants in the UK private rental sector, primarily in relation to landlord behaviour. The impacts of the landlord-tenant relationship are organised around three themes: repairs, conditions and not 'rocking the boat'; flexibility with rents, tenancy length and personalisation; and discrimination, exclusion, and moral judgements. Here they draw out links between negative impacts on wellbeing associated with poor property conditions and a lack of action from landlords to undertake the necessary repairs, leading to both negative mental and physical health outcomes. They highlight further nuances, particularly that the fear of eviction remains even if the tenant describes a positive relationship with the landlord, underlining the highly unequal nature of the relationship.

Flexibility in leases emerged as contested across rents, personalisation and length of lease. During the pandemic, while some tenants were able to negotiate reduced rents or deferrals, others couldn't broker a similar deal. Tenants also struggled with the ability to make their rental a 'home', with autonomy too tightly entangled with housing tenure, knowing that they could be asked to leave dependent on the landlord's decisions.

Discrimination also remained prevalent with tenants describing being discriminated against based on their socio-economic status, something that has increased along with pre-tenancy credit checks. Regardless of income, however, McKee and Harris found that tenants broadly faced challenges and that landlord-tenant relationships were 'fraught with informal codes, personal judgements, and discretionary decision-making' (2023, p. 16). Across all three themes, it showed that tenants remained at the 'whim of the landlord', offering a relational understanding of tenant and landlord classes.

McCarthy and Simcock (2024) show how the unevenness of housing experiences between homeowners and renters plays out in the context of pet ownership, drawing on a UK study. There is documented evidence that pet ownership is beneficial to mental and physical health, but in many jurisdictions renters face barriers to owning a pet, and therefore miss out on these benefits. Although in many places pets cannot reasonably be denied, research shows that tenants are often denied tenancy by landlords, citing concern over damage, even if they have never had experienced this in previous tenancies. Renters also often pay a premium for pet friendly accommodation, either through higher rents or being charged a non-refundable pet fee. Even within renter cohorts, there are uneven experiences of pet ownership with lower income households, African American, domestic violence victims and the homeless, more likely to be discriminated against because of having a pet (Stone et al., 2021; Toohey & Krahn, 2018). Directly linking class relations to pet ownership and renting, research shows that breeds popular with lower income groups are often labelled as 'nuisance dogs' and used as grounds for eviction.

However, there is some work that shows that allowing tenants to have pets can lead to better outcomes for landlords, with the tenants more likely to stay in the property for longer, as well as helping to facilitate better landlord tenant communication and relations (Graham et al., 2018). Regardless, McCarthy and Simcock's review shows that landlords generally overestimate the costs of renting to tenants with pets while underestimating the value and benefits that it can bring. The restrictions on renting with pets that this subsequently leads to then imposes higher costs on tenants and society, for example through potential savings to both the tenants and healthcare system by taking advantage of the documents benefits of animal companionship (McCarthy and Simcock, 2024).

In her article, Sowmya Balachandran (2023) shifts focus to homeownership. Unequal access to homeownership has profound implications for subsequent wealth accumulation trajectories. She zooms in on the persistent and deep racial wealth divides in the United States and the role of housing, particularly property ownership in producing and maintaining these divides. The starting point of her analysis is the dual trend of deepening racial wealth divides and decreasing Black homeownership rates after the 2008-crisis. The study is furthermore embedded in a wider

recognition that property and mortgage markets have historically been central in structuring racial and class inequalities, e.g., through selectively restricting credit access or charging higher interest rates. Balachandran's study shows how promoting homeownership among low-income and minority groups, in an effort to let these groups benefit from housing-wealth accumulation, comes with specific risks and challenges. It requires 'transformative housing policy' that strengthens 'institutional structures that address vulnerabilities and risks for these groups under racial capitalism'. This particularly concerns housing institutions, community organisations and faith-based organisations that can provide crucial support networks.

Recognising that it is difficult to make poor and minority groups truly benefit from homeownership, relates to a broader question. Should the effort be to spread the promises of homeownership more widely across populations, or should it focus on reducing tenurial gaps by shaping our housing systems according to other values?

The values underpinning housing systems

Mirte Jepma, Federico Savini and Alessandro Coppola's (2024) analysis of the dynamics between affordability, accessibility and autonomy in collaborative housing projects argue that there is potential to embed these values in collaborative housing projects. 'Collaborative housing' is increasingly endorsed as a potential solution to diverse housing market pitfalls, and their study brings into view the factors helping and hindering single collaborative housing projects to balance these goals. Trade-offs between these ambitions are inevitable, the authors suggest, for instance with more autonomy potentially encouraging more exclusion, and thus less accessibility. Examining eight collaborative housing projects across Amsterdam and Milan, the authors bring attention to the way the values of residents (and communities of residents) get articulated (or not) in their housing, but also the institutional and regulatory contexts, which together condition to what extent affordability, accessibility and autonomy feature in housing projects.

Rachael McClatchey, Katie McClymont, Emma Griffin and Laurence Carmichael (2023) similarly focus on what they term community-led housing, which is characterised by meaningful community engagement, community ownership or management of the property, and legally protecting benefits to the local community. Similar to collaborative housing, community-led housing is an umbrella term that includes various types of co-operatives, co-housing initiatives and so forth. Through a systematic review of academic literature, they paint a largely positive picture of the potential of community-led housing to enhance residents' health outcomes. Positive impacts, for example, pertain to increased physical activity, healthy eating and wellbeing. Furthermore, they find positive impacts on 'psychosocial housing factors which are known to be beneficial for health,

including social contact, affordability, employment potential, safety, and environmental sustainability' (McClatchey et al., 2023).

Alternative housing models, such as collaborative or community-led housing, are relatively more intentional and explicit in the values they seek to embed in housing. This follows, since collaborative housing is about giving agency to its residents—whether renters or owners—through governance arrangements that support direct resident involvement. Subsequently, despite the relatively marginal status of collaborative housing projects, they give us pause to reflect on the kinds of values mainstream housing provision upholds. Whatever our system of housing, it embeds certain values while others get demoted or shut down. Often glossed over in public discourse are the ways those priorities are determined and the mechanisms through which they are embedded and reinforced. Collaborative housing makes this visible, as well as the 'inevitable' trade-offs involved.

The contributions by Jepma and colleagues and McClatchey and colleagues, not only challenge the ownership-renting binary central to housing-class schemes, but also encourage reflection on how housing systems (through policy interventions, etc) manage 'inevitable' trade-offs. These 'alternative' housing models speak of concrete possibilities for housing provision that centres other values, including those that upend largely unchallenged orthodoxies of housing as asset, as well as homeownership as autonomy.

Gabriela Debrunner, Michael Kolocek, and Arthur Schindelegger (2024) write about the potential for certain legal institutions, such as tenancy law, to assist in decommodifying housing. Their study examines tenancy law (e.g., tenants and landlord rights) across Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Through their analysis, the authors demonstrate how Germany and Austria have relatively favourable tenancy protections, compared with Switzerland, for instance. For instance, German and Austrian tenants cannot be evicted at short notice, cannot be evicted/terminated unless the landlord plans to use the residence themselves, and cannot be hit with arbitrary rent raises.

Comparative studies of housing systems remain essential in exposing key legal differences (e.g., in managing tenant housing needs) even in three Western European social welfare states with unitary housing systems. This study is helpful in reminding us about the foundational role of tenancy protections in assuaging the polarising dynamics we have described (e.g., the privilege property owners over non-owners). A key takeaway is the role of policy and regulatory intervention in shifting gears, in supporting a housing system that prioritises values beyond wealth generation. As the Debrunner and colleagues' discussion plainly illustrates, housing systems are not static, and landlord-tenant relationships are not unchangeable and undesirable outcomes need not be predetermined. Policy interventions and regulation can and do shift the values upheld in housing. Here, tenancy laws clearly become levers through which to tame the

mechanics of the housing system that do not 'naturally' offer any such protections. Put differently, when housing is prioritised as an asset, housing functions effectively as an engine for inequality. When it prioritises housing as home, housing meets a range of socially beneficial needs and wants. In sum, the more tenants' rights get prioritised, the more housing's function as an engine of inequality gets tamed and housing-related vulnerabilities are tempered.

Mikael Mangold, Helena Bohman, Tim Johansson and Jenny von Platten (2023) situate their contribution on the economic and spatial impacts of the housing sector through the lens of renovations. These have been linked to gentrification, impacts on the quality of tenants' lives, and long term housing outcomes. Looking at the rental sector in Sweden, they ask whether ownership structures matter for decisions to renovate and to increase rents more. They hypothesise that private companies, who have notably expanded their rental portfolios in Sweden, will more likely be driven by increasing shareholder value, rather than social responsibilities. The latter are more likely to be foregrounded by public housing companies. Their research broadly confirms this hypothesis. Higher rates of renovation and lower rates of rent increases were predominantly adopted by public housing companies. Additionally, it was found that private housing companies carried out less renovations in lower income areas, while increasing rents more in the lower income segment than their higher income counterparts. This leads to concerns around the provision of adequate affordable housing and has significant impacts for the 'environmental and social sustainability' in the Swedish housing sector, particularly in light of the increasing share of the rental market acquired by private housing companies.

The policy review, the last contribution in this issue, focuses on social mixing policies. A particularly contested type of housing policy as regards its impacts, Rikke Skovgaard Nielsen and Steven Kromhout (2023) compare such policies in the Netherlands and Denmark. These include highly controversial mixing policies, such as the Dutch 'Rotterdam Act' which allows municipalities to bar low-income tenants from renting housing in designated areas, and the Danish ghetto policy which targets neighbourhoods with low-income and minority concentrations for far-reaching policy interventions including evictions, large-scale demolitions and punitive measures. These policies are, among other things, hostile towards (prospective) renters, and therefore need to be considered an outcome of housing-class politics. Skovgaard Nielsen and Kromhout move beyond criticism to specifically explore how the policy design differs with regard to the role of the national government. Whereas in the Netherlands, the national level has reduced its role in recent decades, in Denmark, the trend was the opposite. Skovgaard Nielsen and Kromhout argue that this can have important consequences for the impacts of social mixing programmes. They contend that the Danish approach leaves less room for local adaptation 'according to local views and needs' and may thus prove less effective than the Dutch approach. More

broadly, and in relation to the papers above, the review may be read as an argument that not only the values underpinning policies matter, but also the specific ways how a policy is implemented.

Conclusion

Housing inequality will likely remain a significant area of research for the foreseeable future. In this editorial we have highlighted approaches and work that have been central to debates on housing inequality, from the role that assetisation has played in the housing crisis to the intersectional and compounding experiences of inequality that sees home ownership becoming one of the main engines driving social sorting and discrimination. The contributions in this issue illustrate that this plays out across different geographies and housing systems and provide insights for housing policy. As editors we believe that such research is critical to informing debates and policy and essential to addressing housing inequality and the host of associated impacts such inequality has across other domains such as health, education and employment. We hope that *IJHP* will continue to profile work that brings light to these issues.

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