

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HOUSING: TRENDS IN PUBLIC HOUSING INTERNATIONALLY

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Executive Summary

The Future of Public Housing project (www.futureofpublichousing.ca) seeks to address the gap in knowledge on public housing by focusing on an international, multidisciplinary and comparative investigation of the history, current situation and possible futures for public housing. A first phase of research conducted in the summer of 2014 explored historical patterns in the provision of public housing in four global regions: North America, the EU, Eastern Europe and East and Southeast Asia. Data was collected from countries in the four regions focusing on key indicators related to the state of the public housing sector: number of units of public housing, percentage of public housing compared to market housing, distribution of tenure types in public housing stock, historical patterns of public housing as a percentage of total housing stock, and public housing rents compared to market rents. This data was represented visually using maps and diagrams, allowing for a comparative analysis of trends and patterns. Individual country profiles were created, allowing for a more in-depth depiction of public housing data for each country as well as narrative descriptions of the public housing structure, tenure and key historical policy trends. Initial analysis reveals that there is a lessening of public sector involvement in public housing; out of sixteen countries with available historical data, twelve showed declining percentages of public housing stock since the 1990's. Closer examination of countries where there are increasing units of public housing show that there are challenges in keeping up with increasing population growth - while numbers of units may be increasing, percentages are decreasing.

Within this general trend of declining stocks, the data also demonstrates that there is a wide variation in the countries studied, from a high of 82% in Singapore to a low of .4% in Latvia. Many countries use a mix of tenures including co-operative housing and ownership in addition to the more common rental tenure; ownership as a key public housing tenure is particularly prevalent in countries with a high percentage of public housing (www.futureofpublichousing.ca). Indications of other trends include privatization of public housing stock with insufficient replacement, shifts toward rent subsidies vs. units of public housing, and an increasing residualisation of public housing to ever-more specific target populations.

At the same time, there are a small number of countries and regions where public housing is an increasing priority of public policy and funding, and where target groups are being expanded rather than restricted. In Asia, Singapore and Hong Kong have been leaders in public housing for years, with 82% and 47% of the population housed in public housing respectively (Housing and Development Board, 2013; Hong Kong Housing Society 2013). More recently, China has launched one of the most ambitious public housing construction project with a target of 36 million units by 2015 while in South Korea the public housing sector has been expanding since 1989 (Ronald, R. and Doling, J. 2013; Lee, H. and Ronald, R. 2012). In Eastern Europe, Poland stands out as an alternative to the general trend of mass privatization of public housing stock in the region, with 29.4% of its total housing stock consisting of public housing (CECODHAS 2012). While these countries are a distinct minority, they provide important examples of countries that are defining a different path for public housing in the context of neoliberalism and downsizing of government involvement.

Introduction

Access to affordable and adequate housing is an issue for almost every nation and city. While in the past the state provision of public housing addressed this need, currently, most countries have lessened their response. In this environment there is an absence of sustained, systematic, and informed consideration of the state's role in provision of such housing. Yet, indicators are that such consideration must be central to any resolution of the complexity of housing issues faced by many countries globally. The Future of Public Housing project seeks to address the gap in knowledge on public housing by focusing on an international, multidisciplinary and comparative investigation of the history, current situation and possible futures for public housing.

Public housing can be seen in various forms in most regions of the world. While the common mandate of public housing is to provide housing that is affordable for the residents of a particular region, the definitions and criteria for allocation and eligibility, governance and management policies, and typologies of housing forms and use vary widely. While some definitions of public housing focus specifically on housing that is owned and managed by the government for target populations, in order to capture a range of public-assisted mechanisms we are taking a broader view of public housing as:

Housing that is developed, regulated and / or funded by the government to provide affordable housing for the public. Depending on the particular scheme, the housing produced may or may not be managed by the government; may include rental and ownership (with restrictions on resale); may be universal or targeted to particular groups.

The stock of public housing that was built after WW II is deteriorating and many countries have focused on privatizing this housing through redevelopment or selling of housing units. Social housing that is rental, and owned and managed by government authorities and/or non-profit organizations has become the dominant form of public housing provided in many jurisdictions but this housing only addresses the needs of targeted groups (i.e., the homeless; seniors; those with multiple barriers). This housing is often under threat of funding cuts and is focused on increasingly smaller segments of the population, despite a well-documented increasing need for affordable housing in many regions (Hoard, N. 2012; Tsenkova, S. 2008). This research for this project captures social housing units but also provides data on the other forms of assistance that governments are providing.

While there is existing research on public housing focused on individual countries, there is much less comparative research that compares countries and patterns of allocation by geographical and socio-economic distribution. A survey of policy approaches in 13 countries (van Vliet, Huttman and Fava, 1985) compiled data on countries in various regions but, given the extensive restructuring of public housing policies that has occurred in the last 30 years, is dated. Recent EU reports (Whitehead and Scanlon, 2007; 2008; Czischke, 2009) reviewed policies in European countries and did some comparative work on particular policies and practices.

The goal of the research project is to explore through comparative international research how access to affordable and adequate housing, and the role of the state in providing public housing to address this need is accommodated. The aim of the research is to stimulate debate regarding 'the future of public housing' and the role of governments in their responsibilities in the delivery of housing.

Key questions associated with this central task are:

- What is the future for public housing in an era of neo-liberal reform?
- What role did public housing play historically in the shaping of communities and in defining the rights and responsibilities between the state and its citizens and what role should it now be playing?
- What policies and strategies can be introduced that will ensure that all of a state's citizens are adequately housed?

The research is guided by a series of thematic foci:

Theme 1: An Overview of the issues: What do we know and do not know about public housing?; What are the definitional issues and how are they affecting our understanding of public housing? How has public housing been transformed?; What role has public housing played in society?; What are the patterns of built form and use of public housing?; What regional economic patterns affect public housing, and in turn, how does the provision of public housing impact economic development? What are the legal and institutional contexts affecting public housing?

Theme 2: Methodological Approaches: How can public housing be studied in a comparative way?; What are the methodological approaches needed to study it?; What methods are the most effective?

Theme 3: The Framework to Study the Future of Public Housing: What framework is needed to investigate the future of public housing?; What role can research play in impacting public housing policies?; What are the policy, planning and practice issues that need to be researched? Who funds, owns, manages, maintains, builds, supervises, allocates and profits from public housing?; How can public housing be better integrated spatially, in terms of design and built form, as well as management, common services and activities in public spaces?

Theme 4: The 'hybridity' of public housing: How is, and can, the delivery of public housing be extended to include housing by the private, non-profit and public sectors? What role is, and could, municipalities play in the delivery of housing? How can address the dichotomy between subsidizing people and providing homes?

Research Methodology

A first phase of research conducted in the summer of 2014 explored current and historical patterns in the provision of public housing in four global regions: North America, the EU, Eastern Europe and East and Southeast Asia. Data was collected from countries in the four regions focusing on key indicators related to the state of the public housing sector: number of units of public housing, percentage of public housing compared to market housing, distribution of tenure types in public housing stock, historical patterns of public housing as a percentage of total housing stock, and public housing rents compared to market rents. This data was represented visually using maps and diagrams, allowing for a comparative analysis of trends and patterns. Individual country profiles were created, allowing for a more in-depth depiction of public housing data for each country as well as narrative descriptions of the public housing structure, tenure and key historical trends.

Defining Public Housing

In order to guide data collection and analysis, a definition of public housing was created by examining formal definitions as well as descriptions of programs and interventions in countries where public housing is undertaken on a broad scale. From there, a working definition of public housing was created as noted above. This definition is much broader than the much narrower definition of public housing as housing used in many Western countries, and encompasses terms and housing typologies such as social housing and co-operative housing.

Data collection

An initial scan was conducted of key sources of housing data in a number of countries and regions to determine what data was readily available in a sufficient number of countries that a comparative analysis could be conducted. Following the scan, data was collected from the selected countries from a variety of sources including reports produced by government or non-profits, government statistical bureaus, government agencies responsible for housing, and academic articles. Particularly rich comparative data was available for countries in the European Union; two key sources included Dol and Haffner's *Housing Statistics in the European* (2010) and CECODHAS Housing Europe's *Housing Europe Review: The nuts and bolts of European social housing systems* (2012). These documents, along with Whitehead and Scanlon's earlier publication, *Social Housing in Europe* (2007) were foundational sources for selecting, collecting and organizing comparative data. Because of challenges of comparative international housing research, a Sources and Notes document provides general notes for the research results, country-specific sources and notes and a full reference list.

Data collected for selected countries included:

- Total numbers of public housing units or households living in public housing (current data). Where possible, this was separated into co-operative housing and rental / ownership tenures. Insufficient information was available in most of the selected countries to separate rental and ownership tenures in public housing stock. Total numbers of private housing stock was also collected and where possible, separated into ownership and rental tenures.
- Public housing units or households as a percentage of total housing stock (current data)
- Public housing rents as a percentage of market rents (current data).
- Historical data on public housing units or households as a percentage of total housing stock for selected countries from 1990 – 2014.
- Individual country profiles were created, allowing for a more in-depth depiction of public housing data for each country as well as narrative descriptions of the public housing structure, tenure and key historical trends.

Note: 'Current' data includes the most recent data found for each country, and falls within the years 2006 – 2014.

Data analysis and presentation

A data visualization approach was used to visually and geo-spatially present the data, creating a series of maps and graphs. Exploratory data analysis of the maps and graphs was conducted, identifying key patterns and trends in public housing. Visual presentation of the data allowed for clear and compelling presentation of research results.

Gaps and limitations

- **Historical data:** the research had intended to gather data on public housing as a percentage of public housing stock for the entire post-war period (1945 – current). However, in this initial phase there was insufficient data available to do this. The next phase of the

project aims to work with international housing researchers to collect post-war data in selected countries

- **Selected countries:** the project was limited by language and availability of data in the initial research phase. The next phase of the project aims to build on results from the initial phase to include other regions where there is public housing in some countries but data may be more difficult to find, particularly Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
- **Units of measurement:** Different countries report housing statistics in different ways; as a result, units of measurement are not always the same from country to country. For example, some countries report units of public housing while others report number of households living in public housing. Much more rarely, some countries report percentage of population housed in public housing.
- **Rent supplements:** Rent supplements are payments by government provided directly to individuals or households to subsidize the cost of renting. In some countries, rent supplements are managed by public housing bodies and reported on with numbers of public housing units. In other countries, rent supplements may be managed and issued by non-housing bodies, and are reported separately. For some countries, rent supplement information was not readily available and / or reported in a different format than number of housing units whereas in other countries it was impossible to separate out numbers of households supported by rental supplements. As a result, country-specific numbers and percentages include rent supplements for some countries but do not for others. This obviously compromises the comparability of figures between countries and speaks to the challenge of doing international comparative research on public housing. The specific issue of rent supplements may be considered more deeply in the next phase of research.
- **Assistance to home owners:** Home ownership is a key public housing tenure in some countries (eg. Singapore and Hong Kong) and data for public housing units includes both rental units and home-ownership units. In these cases, there are requirements related to eligibility and resale that keep public home ownership units in the 'public pool'. In other countries, assistance to home owners may be significant – for example, subsidies to low-income home owners to purchase homes. Home ownership units have only been included in the data where data was available and where long-term deed restrictions exist to ensure that these units continue to function as public housing units rather than private market units. For some countries this a 'moving target' as length of deed restrictions may change with new governments.

Research is also being done on regional timelines of key public housing policy decisions, mapped out visually for each country and including key historical events for each region that the literature describes as having a major impact on housing policy such as the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-98 or the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980's (Doling and Richard, 2013; Monkonnien, 2009).

It is intended to build on results from the initial phase to include other regions where there is public housing in some countries but data may be more difficult to find, particularly Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

Research Findings

Analysis reveals that there is a lessening of involvement in public housing in most countries. Closer examination of countries where there are increasing units of public housing show that there are challenges in keeping up with increasing population growth - while numbers of units may be increasing, percentages are decreasing.

Historical Trends

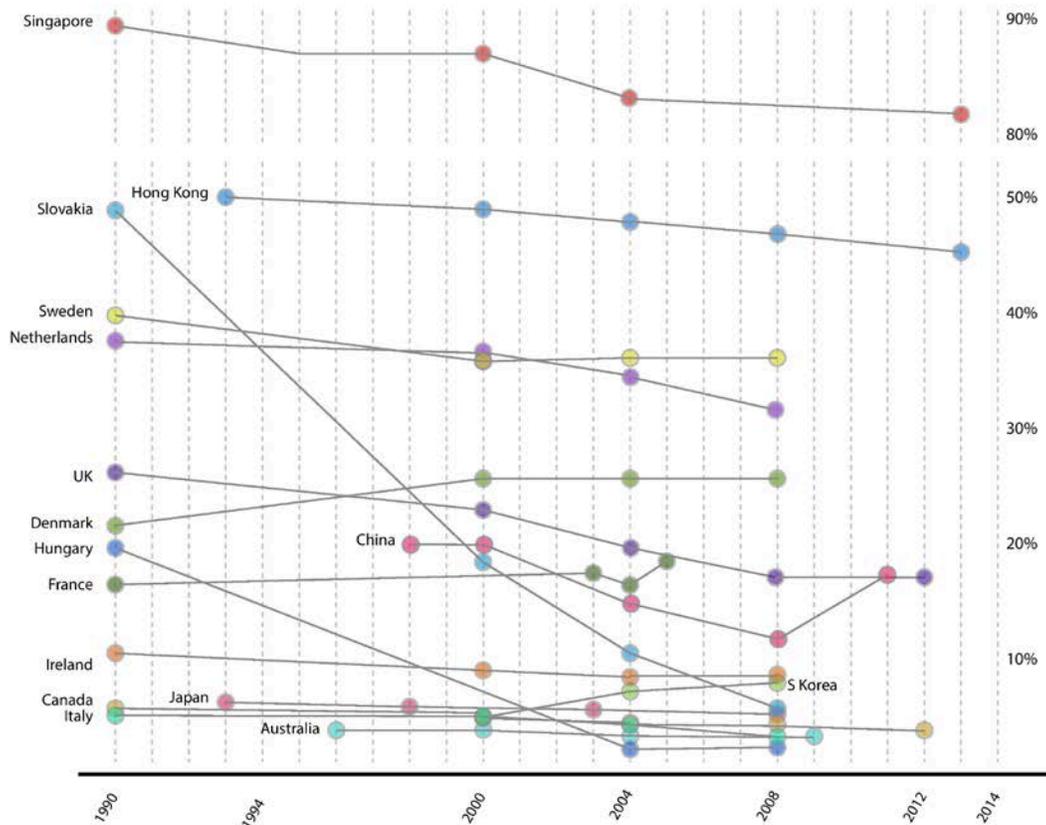
Initial analysis reveals that there is a lessening of public sector involvement in public housing in selected countries; out of sixteen countries with available historical data, twelve showed declining percentages of public housing stock since the 1990's. Precipitous declines can be seen in Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Slovakia, as a result of the post-communist privatization of housing stock. Counter to the general trend, there are a few countries where public housing has increased since 1990 (Denmark, France, South Korea), or have shown more recent upward trends (China).

Within this general trend of declining stocks, the data also demonstrates that there is a wide variation in the countries studied, from a high of 82% in Singapore to a low of .4% in Latvia. Many countries use a mix of tenures including co-operative housing and ownership in addition to the more common rental tenure; ownership as a key public housing tenure is particularly prevalent in countries with a high percentage of public housing. Indications of other trends include privatization of public housing stock with insufficient replacement, shifts toward rent subsidies vs. units of public housing, and an increasing residualisation of public housing to ever more specific target populations.

Public Housing Stock: Historical Trends

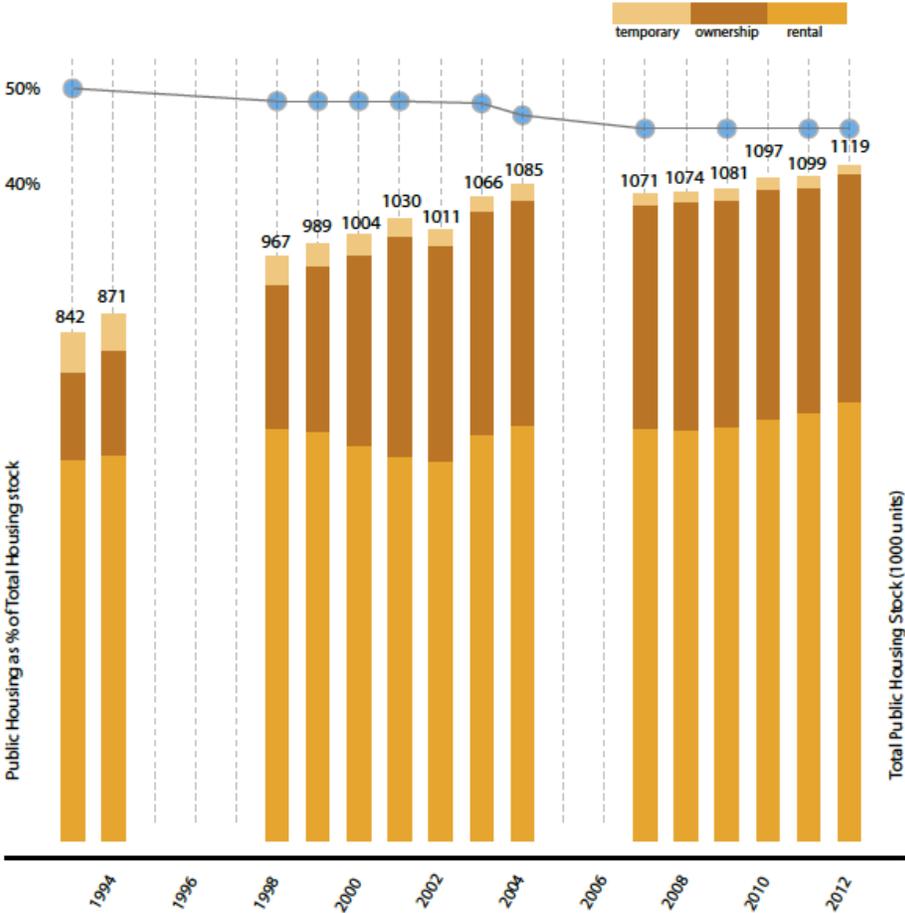
in Selected Countries

The following graphs showcase the historical trends in selected countries from 1990 - 2014.



Closer examination of country-specific data reveals some cases where there are increasing units of public housing but decreasing percentages of public housing stock. Even where there may be commitment to building more public housing units, there are challenges in keeping up with increasing growth of the population or private housing stock. Hong Kong, for example, added 277,000 units of public housing from 1994 – to 2012 but the percentage of households living in public housing declined from 50.4% to 46.8% over the same period.

Hong Kong, Historical Trends in Public Housing Stock 1993 - 2012



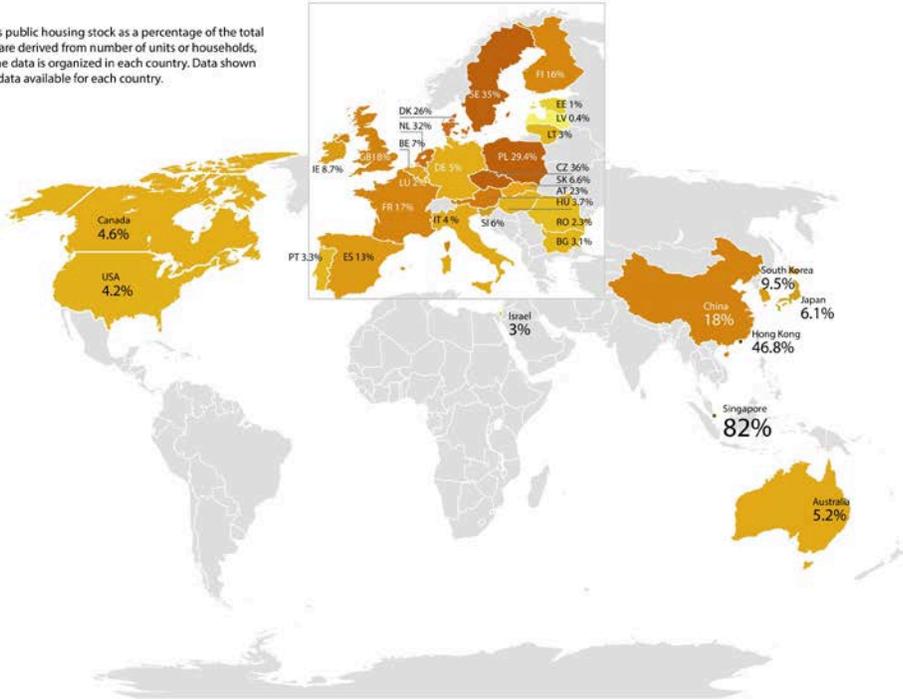
Public Housing as a Percentage of Total Stock

Within the general trend of declining public housing stocks, the data also demonstrates that there is a wide variation in the countries studied, from a high of 82% in Singapore to a low of .4% in Latvia. At the same time, there are a small number of countries and regions where public housing is an increasing priority of public policy and funding, and where target groups are being expanded rather than restricted. In Asia, Singapore and Hong Kong have been leaders in public housing for years, with 75.8% and 47% of the population housed in public housing respectively (Housing and Development Board, 2013; Hong Kong Housing Society 2013). More recently, China has launched one of the most ambitious public housing construction project with a target of 36 million units by 2015 while in South Korea the public housing sector has been expanding since 1989 (Ronald, R. and Doling, J. 2013; Lee, H. and Ronald, R. 2012).

Western Europe’s strong tradition of public housing is evident, with Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria’s public housing stock ranging between 23 – 40% of total stock. In Eastern Europe, Poland stands out as an alternative to the general trend of mass privatization of public housing stock in the region, with 29.4% public housing retained as a percentage of total stock. While these countries are a distinct minority, they provide important examples of countries that are defining a different path for public housing in the context of neoliberalism and downsizing of government involvement. Many countries use a mix of tenures including co-operative housing and ownership in addition to the more common rental tenure. Looking at country-specific data, ownership as a key public housing tenure is particularly prevalent in countries with a high percentage of public housing; in Singapore, 94.3% of public housing is owner-occupied while in Hong Kong 33.4% is owner-occupied.

Public Housing Stock as Percentage of Total Stock
in Selected Countries

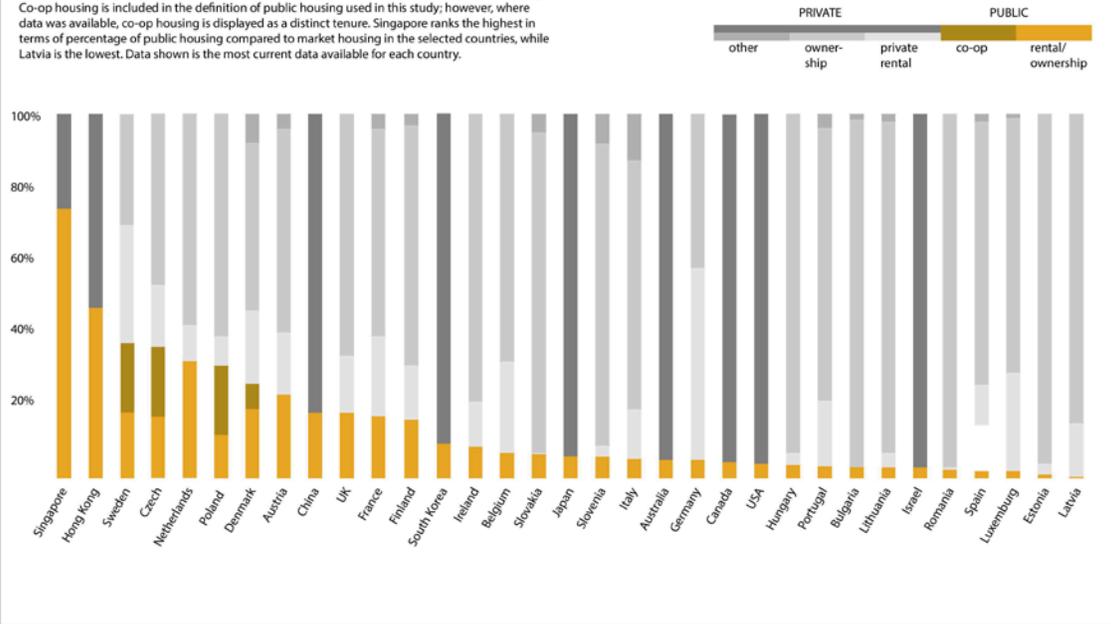
This map showcases public housing stock as a percentage of the total stock. Percentages are derived from number of units or households, according to how the data is organized in each country. Data shown is the most current data available for each country.



Housing Stock Structure by Tenure

in Selected Countries

The following graph shows the housing stock structure in selected countries, comparing percentages of public to market housing. Where data is available, market housing is separated into ownership and rental tenures; where data is not available, ownership and rental are shown as market housing. Co-op housing is included in the definition of public housing used in this study; however, where data was available, co-op housing is displayed as a distinct tenure. Singapore ranks the highest in terms of percentage of public housing compared to market housing in the selected countries, while Latvia is the lowest. Data shown is the most current data available for each country.

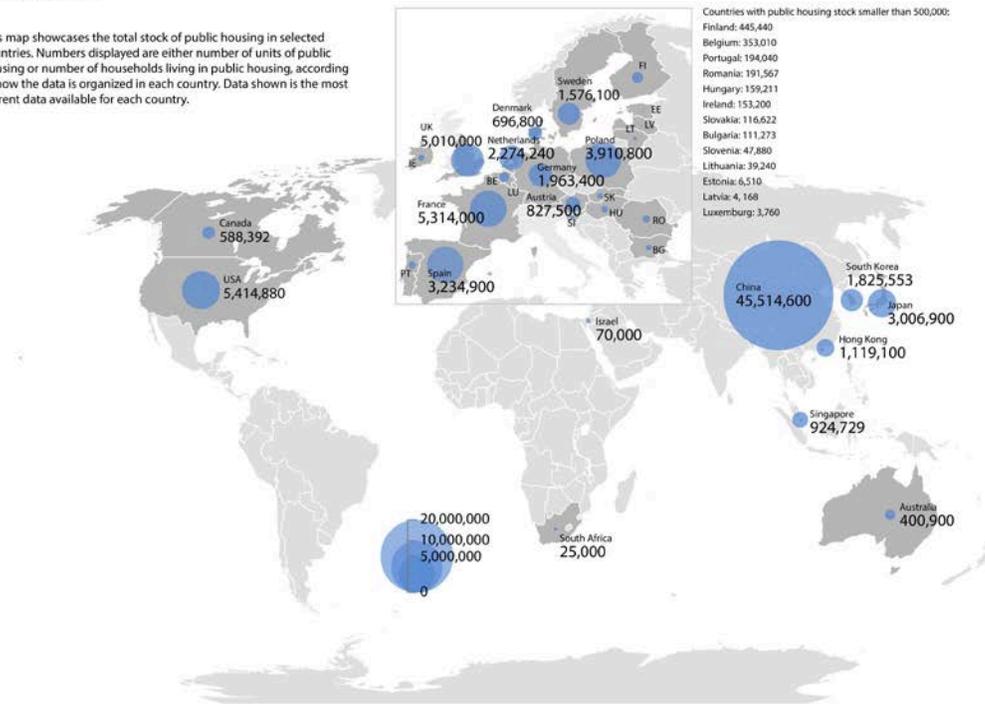


Public Housing Stock, Total Units and Households

Again, the wide variation between countries is evident in the total dwelling units or households living in public housing. China stands out with over 45 million dwellings with Lithuania at a low of 3,760. Numbers of dwelling are of course relative to population; however the *scale* of commitment to build sufficient public housing required in countries with large populations stands as a reminder of vast population differences. As well, the small numbers of public housing stock relative to private housing stock in most countries clearly stands out.

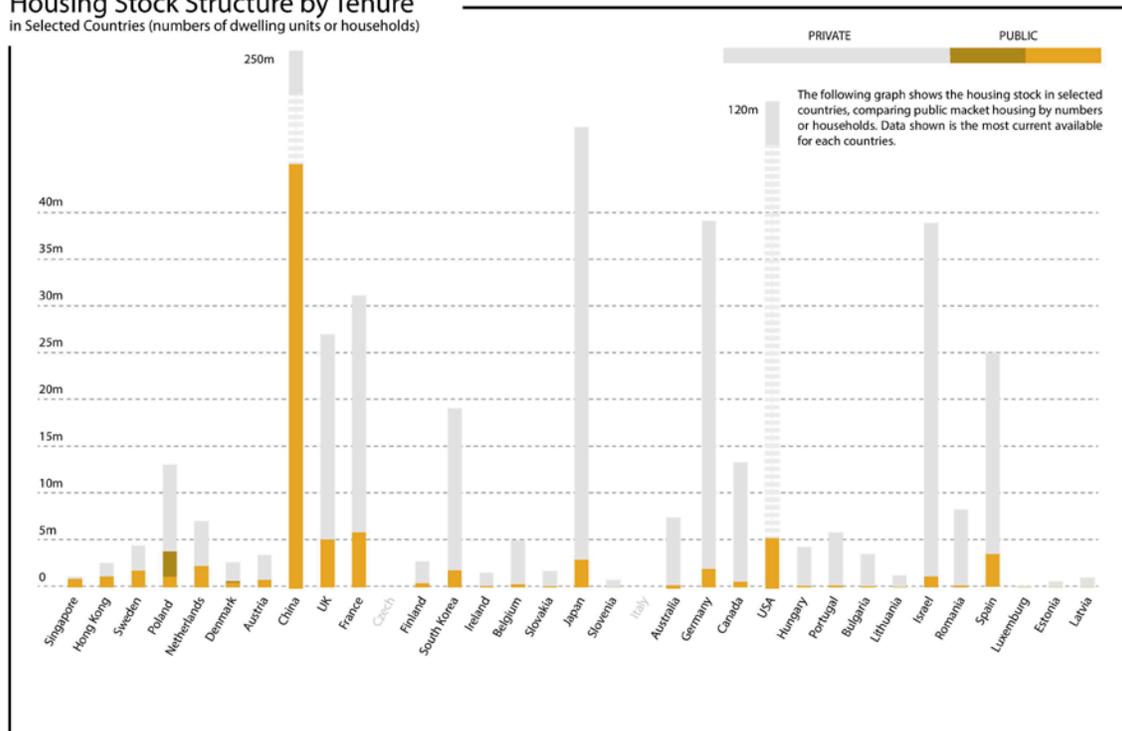
Public Housing Stock, Total Units/Households in Selected Countries

This map showcases the total stock of public housing in selected countries. Numbers displayed are either number of units of public housing or number of households living in public housing, according to how the data is organized in each country. Data shown is the most current data available for each country.



Housing Stock Structure by Tenure in Selected Countries

(numbers of dwelling units or households)

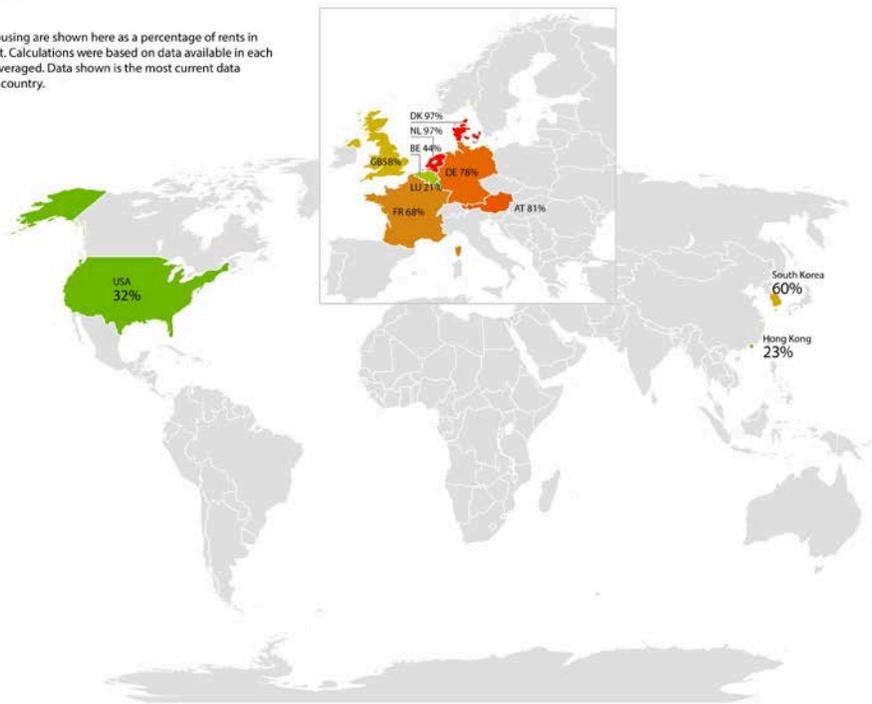


Public Housing Rents as a Percentage of Market Rents

Data on public housing rents was not readily available. Where data was collected, there is wide variation across countries in public housing rents ranging from a high in Denmark where public housing rents are almost the same as market rents at 97.4% to a low in Luxemburg at 20.5%. NOTE: these are rents averaged across each country. Closer examination of country-specific data shows variations within countries; for example, public housing rents in high-cost urban areas may be significantly lower than the national average. This area requires further region or city-specific data collection in order to undertake a more meaningful comparative analysis.

Public Housing Rents as Percentage of Market Rents in Selected Countries

Rents in public housing are shown here as a percentage of rents in the private market. Calculations were based on data available in each country and are averaged. Data shown is the most current data available for each country.



Other potential trends to explore

In analyzing the data collected, there were indications of trends that require further exploration. These include the privatization of public housing stock with insufficient replacement, shifts toward rent subsidies vs. building units of public housing, and an increasing residualisation of public housing to ever-more specific target populations in many countries. Excerpts from country profiles are included below.

Country Profiles

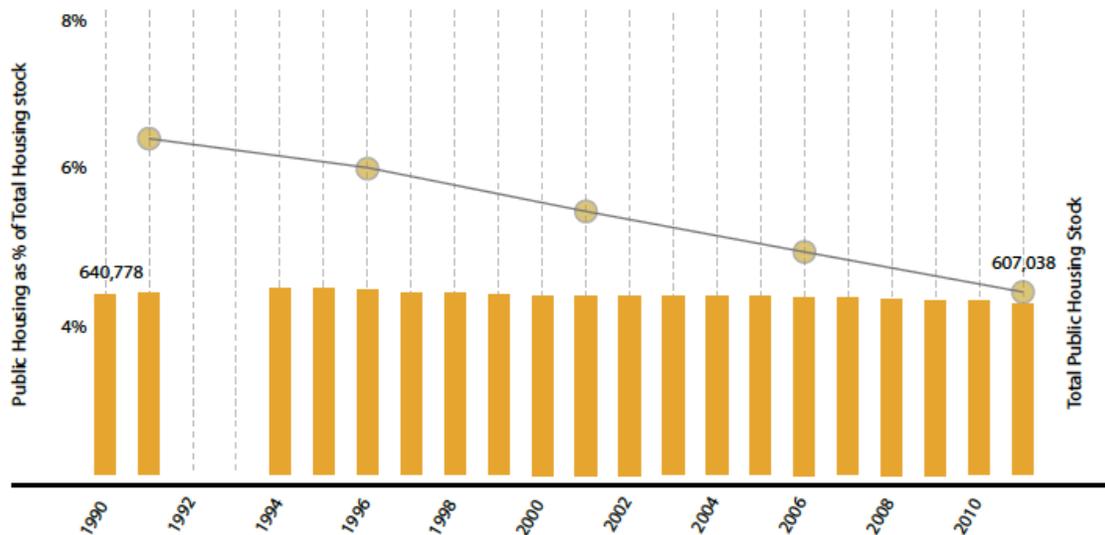
To understand housing contexts and how public housing is delivered in individual countries, country profiles were generated for five countries. The profiles include an overview of the administration and structure of public housing, key trends and milestones, tenure and tenants in public housing, numbers of units / households and public housing as a percentage of total

housing stock, graphs of historical trends, rents in public housing, and geographical distribution of public housing stock.

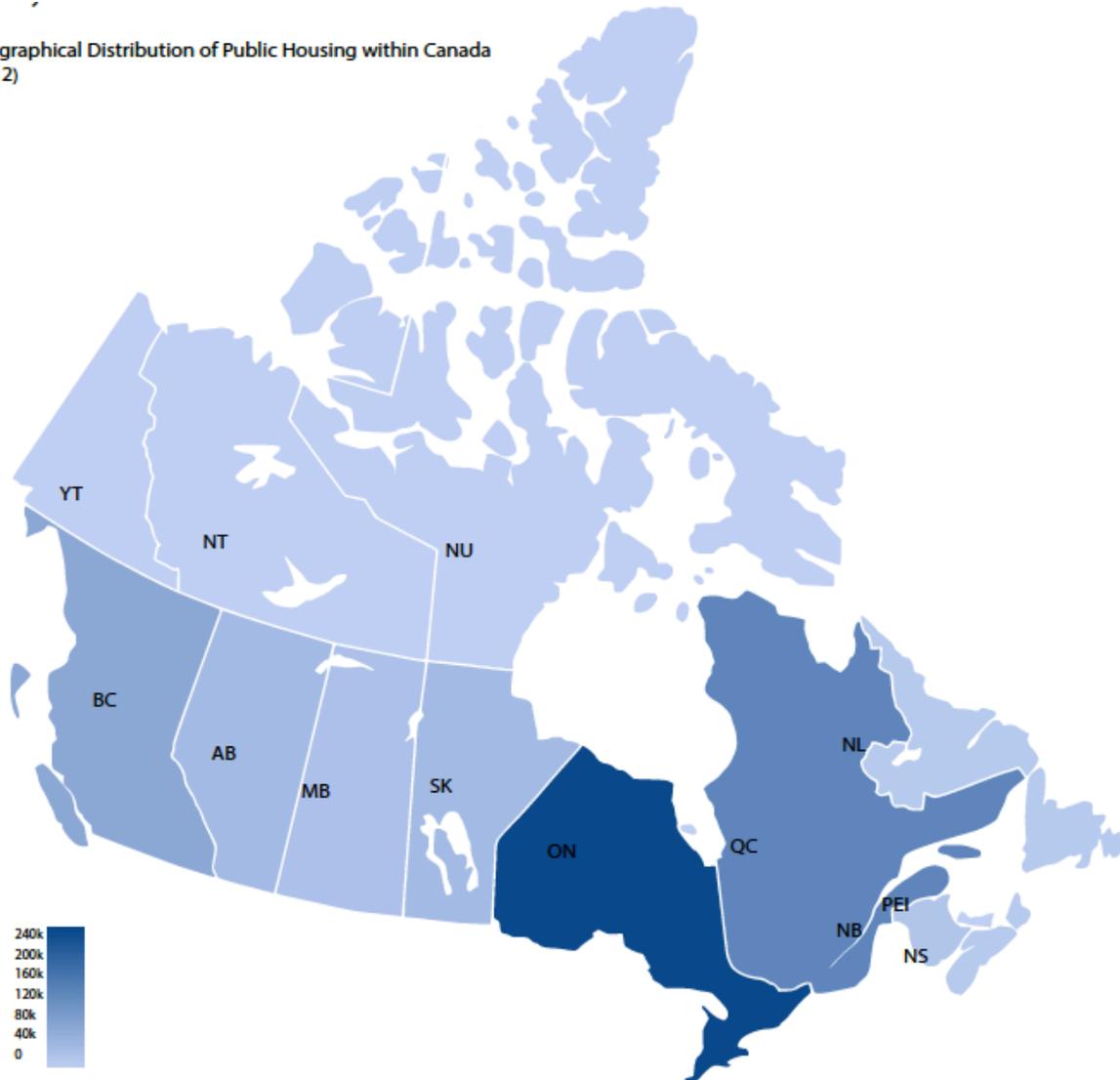
Canada

Canadian public housing was primarily a federal responsibility under the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) until the 1990s, at which point the federal government began devolving administrative and funding responsibility to the provinces (in most cases). Municipal governments are also emerging as key players in development of public housing. Public housing is termed social housing and can be owned and operated by government, or managed by non-profit housing associations often with partial subsidies from multiple levels of governments (local, provincial, federal) for construction and / or operating costs. This housing is prioritized for low-income and other socially disadvantaged group; and rents are set at 30% of income. Housing co-ops have historically received government construction and operation subsidies and provide market and below-market subsidized units. A newly emerging piece of the public-assisted housing puzzle are 'affordable housing' programs, which are trying to address affordability challenges of low- to middle-income households through public-private developments.

Canada, Historical Trends in Public Housing Stock 1990 - 2011



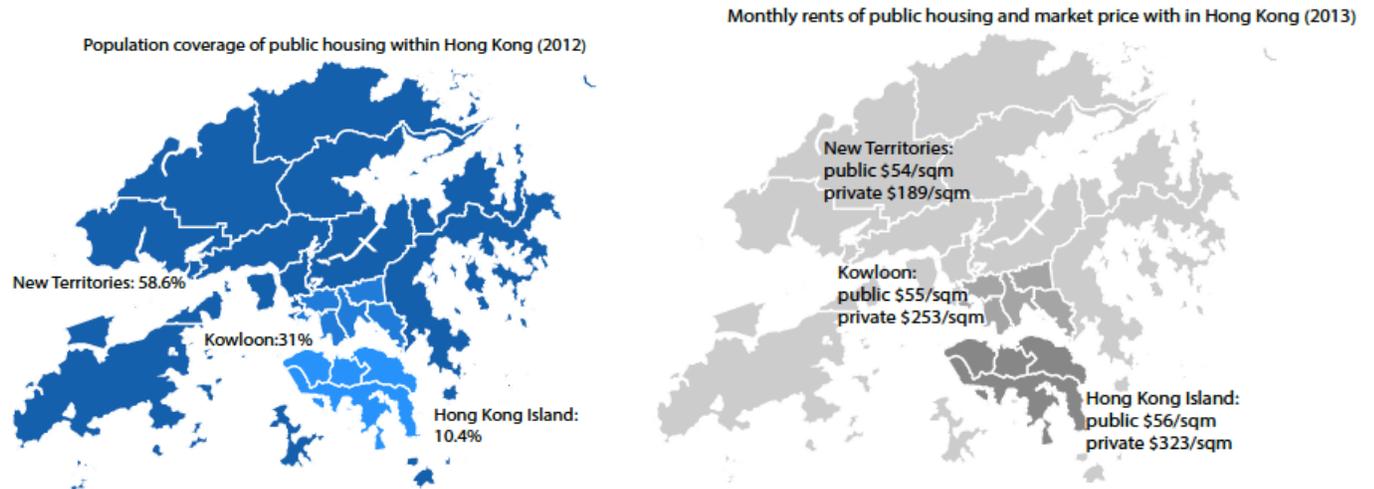
Geographical Distribution of Public Housing within Canada (2012)



USA

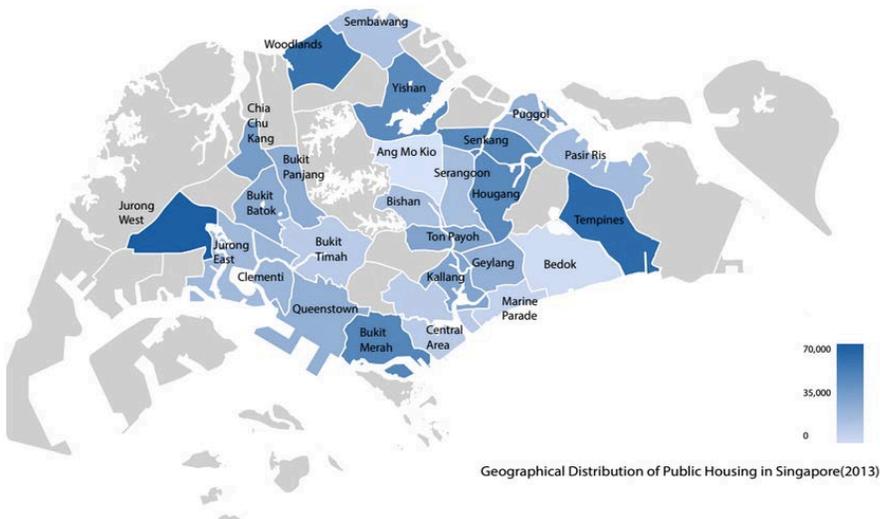
The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the primary agency that funds and regulates public housing in the United States. HUD provides tenant-based assistance via 'housing vouchers' for low-income families used to subsidize rental in the private market. With project-based assistance, units are either privately owned and subsidized by the government, or government owned and run public housing. If a household moves out of the unit, the subsidy stays with the unit. Units are rented to low-income people at below-market rates. Government owned public housing is built and managed by Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) that are regulated by HUD and provide housing for low-income families with rents set at 30% of income. Finally, co-operatives received government subsidies in the 1960's and 70's; many provide units at below-market rates for low to moderate income families.

introduced in the 1990s were focused on ownership for low to moderate income households with prices slightly lower than market.



Singapore

Public housing in Singapore is primarily home ownership assistance through heavily subsidized flats built and funded by the Singapore government through the Housing and Development Board (HDB). Flats are sold on a 99-year lease; resale is in the public market but there are some restrictions for buyers and sellers. Public housing houses a wide range of income groups, including flats built for middle and upper income residents; extra grants are provided to low- and moderate-income families to purchase. A small percentage of rental public housing is available for those who can't afford to buy. HDB takes a 'town planning' approach, building housing complexes around a commercial centre as well as providing homes for aged and disabled, hospices, childcare centres, cancer centres and more.

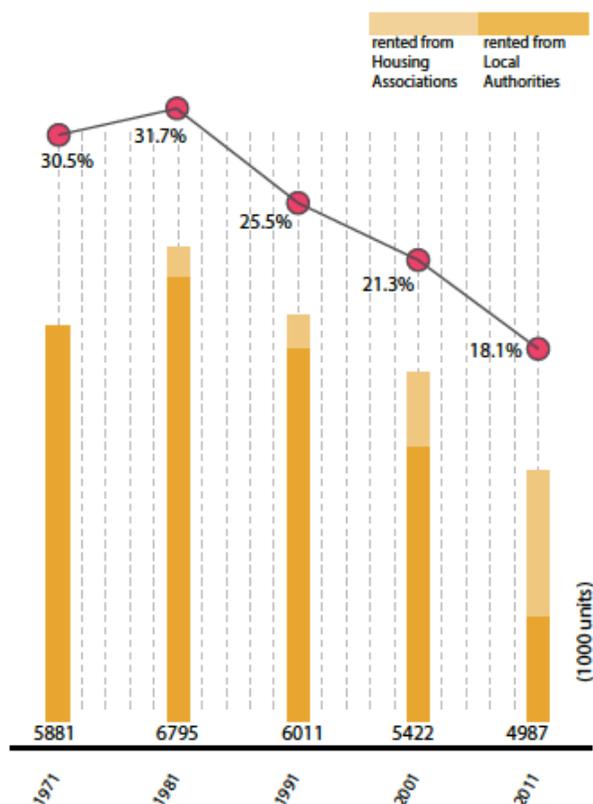


United Kingdom

Public housing in UK is provided primarily by Housing Authorities (non-profit independent

landlords) and to a lesser extent by local authorities (council housing), with a focus on housing those in priority need. Almost 1.8 million public housing units were sold to existing tenants through “Right to Buy” programs starting in the 1980s. Rent supplements through income assistance are an important part of the public housing picture with tenants receiving up to 100% subsidy of their rents in both the public and private housing markets. Currently, rents in public housing are set according to a formula across the sector. There is a small amount of tenant-owned housing cooperatives in the UK.

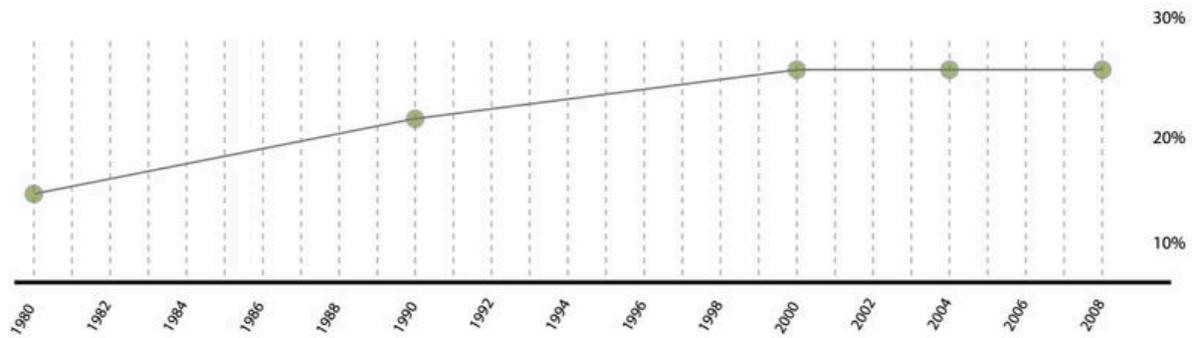
UK, Historical Trends in Public Housing Stock 1971 - 2011



Denmark

Public housing in Denmark consists of social rental and co-operative housing. Social rental housing is provided by not for profit housing associations renting units at cost recovery prices. Housing associations are legally regulated by the state, but owned and organized collectively by the association members themselves. Co-operatives are another form of tenure; in the 1970s legislation was passed to allow renters to buy privately-owned rental property put up for sale and form a co-operative. Co-operatives receive indirect subsidies; some also receive direct government grants. Co-operative units can be sold to individual buyers; rents are paid to the coop and used to pay for loans and maintenance.

Denmark, Historical Trends in Public Housing Stock, 1980 - 2008



Policy trends

Quick comparisons between housing policies of different countries are understandably insufficient, for they vary in administrative structure, delivery system, housing types, tenures and priorities. However, despite the differences, the comparisons of policies of the different cases across their own historical and spatial timelines revealed some overlapping trends. Housing is intrinsically related to population changes, but also requires to be understood within the context of the broader urban economy and ecosystem. Public housing is an urban priority. With increasing populations and need in urban areas, substantial efforts towards provision of public housing have been focused within urban areas in countries ranging from Canada to Hong Kong (insert images).

The role of governments in the construction and provision of public housing has undergone significant shifts in the last five to seven decades. In the post war- years, governments concentrated on improving living conditions that had been ravaged by war and poverty. The policies focused on slum clearance, urban renewal and mass housing constructions. In the 60s, governments across multiple contexts initiated the shift towards home-ownership, gradually incentivizing purchased homes over rented properties. Rented homes gradually were reserved for poorer populations, and middle and upper middle classes moved towards private home-ownership. For example, in Canada, The Rent Supplement Program offers assistance to low-income tenants of selected private and non-profit rental buildings, reducing monthly rental charges based on a rent-geared-to-income approach. Different varieties of financial schemes were designed - for example in Singapore, Central Provident Fund savings were allowed to be withdrawn in order to make down-payments for purchasing properties. This opened up multiple financial sources into the housing economy, which now precariously meshes with the real-estate market. Towards the 1980s, multiple players were encouraged to enter the housing market, and the government took a back seat in construction and management, reserving only regulation and subsidies within its domain.

By the 1990s, most governments reoriented their housing policies towards market practices, thereby allowing the market to dictate the provision and delivery of public housing. For example, HUD in the United States introduced pilot programs - HOPE VI and *Moving to Work*, to revitalize public housing and deconcentrate poverty to create mixed-income housing developments. Newer programs were instituted to transition families out of public housing, and whether mixed income housing on land reserved for public housing indeed allows for mixing of classes or merely frees public land for market speculation remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Broader trends lose out the nuances within contexts, and it is crucial to understand public housing trends within the context of its larger economy, society, government and culture. However, this look at the overall trends of housing data and policies shows a clear decline in the role of the government in the provision and management of access to affordable housing. Additionally, the entry of newer players in the task of providing access to affordable housing has proven insufficient, as revealed in the data discussed in the report.

The central challenge in implementing housing strategies across varying international regimes, and within countries, levels of government, is in defining which level of government would be the most effective, and where should housing policies be directed. To address the housing challenge, policies and strategies would need to include all sectors of the housing market, and employ a broad range of policy levers that influence local and national programs.