

Who are the “good tenants” of public housing in Europe? The older adults!

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Abstract

Studies on discrimination in the housing markets are focusing on different forms of discrimination, groups and housing sectors. Indeed, even if the European public housing sectors have more and more to restrict their dwellings' access to the vulnerable ones (Czischke 2009), studies have shown discrimination in the attribution process of housing (Sala Pala 2005; Bourgeois 2017; Demoulin 2014). To keep or develop neighborhoods that are easy to manage and to promote, housing officers try to avoid the stigmatized public housing tenants seen as trouble makers, as they are pictured in French, German and English discourses. (Bourgeois 2017; Bonnet et al. 2011). Housing officers prioritize households who, they presume, will be “good tenants”. “Good tenants” should be quiet inhabitants with a great moral sense, should not create extra work for the housing managers and take care of their dwelling (Toplavoc et Coinc 1995 dans Demoulin 2014, 125). Groups of public housing tenants are thus “ranked” by housing officers on the ladder of “good tenants” based on different social characteristics. Age is one of the criteria. If “the youths” are perceived by the housing managers as intensive users of common spaces and possible trouble makers, the “elderly” are by contrast considered “good tenants” who need to be welcome and protected. In this talk, I would like to show how housing managers see older tenants and why they support special treatment for those “good tenants”. We will compare the picture of the “elderly” with other groups in the public housing officers discourses. The older tenants are seen by housing stakeholders as “ready to do sacrifice to pay their rent”. They are quiet and long-term clients and neighbours. Besides, they are often local stakeholders and well known by local administration. However, even if the elderly are seen as “good tenants”, the ones with high care needs are considered as not adapted to the public housing sectors. For the public housing representatives, older tenants who need permanent care or unique and customized adaptation of their dwelling to stay at home, are not fitting in a standardized and generalist housing sector.

The talk is based on my PhD thesis on French, German and English public housing organisations and their strategy to target ageing people. I studied three European Areas shaped by ageing and public housing history: Département du Nord, Greater Manchester and the Ruhr Metropole. I analysed, using the neo-institutionalism framework, the housing strategies of 13 Social housing organizations and their participation in local networks. In total I conducted over 120 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders elected members, representative, directors and on-field agents in housing, ageing and social sectors.

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