Special Issue: Housing and community needs and social innovation responses in times of crisis

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1. Rationale

In this special issue we present and analyse innovative practices and policies in European cities that show collective actors and institutions taking action in response to new or inadequately met social needs, in particular those related to housing and community. The area of unmet social needs has at its centre housing, as in the last two decades all major European cities have experienced increasingly severe housing crises, with the result that access and affordability of this basic good has become difficult for larger groups of people. Under the pressure of fiscal austerity, the reduction and privatisation of public services such as social assistance, education and community amenities have resulted in cities being unable to respond to such needs. Goods and services increasingly commodified under market dynamics have become accessible only to those who can afford market prices.

Vis-à-vis this area of need the innovations here presented and discussed aim to improve the conditions of people affected by the processes of social exclusion that are increasingly evident in contemporary societies; while these long-term processes can be observed across Europe, the financial and economic crisis of 2008 has had diverse impacts in the nations and cities sampled in this issue.

There is widespread agreement among contemporary scholars that the area of need has grown, that new forms of social exclusion are emerging and that different social groups are bearing the brunt of the crisis. Following Cassiers and Kasteloot (2012), four processes can be held responsible for the enlargement of the area of unmet social needs: *globalisation*, which directs investment toward the economic competitiveness of cities and territories in preference to the welfare of their citizens; *financialisation*, which pressures for the transformation of low-cost housing areas into primary real estate developments and produces speculative housing markets; *flexibilisation* of the labour market, which leads to unstable and unprotected work arrangements, temporary employment, involuntary part-time work and low-paid employment and thus to an increase in numbers of the working poor as well as high levels of unemployment; and, finally, *restructuring of the State* and the privatisation of public services, which engenders further dynamics of exclusion and deprivation.

To these four processes we add two demographic factors. *Migration*: increasing numbers of migrants seeking safety and new opportunities meet with discrimination and potential exclusion; as a result we see a related but differentiated demand for integration and social assistance. *Aging population*: with reduced pensions and assets in the form of housing property, older people are potentially less able to buy health and assistance in the market.

The starting point of this special issue is thus the clear evidence of a growing area of need resulting from these six processes. This area cannot find satisfaction in the open market because larger social groups do not have the necessary resources. At the same time, social needs are left unsatisfied by the State as well, due to its retrenchment and the resulting reduction in the provision of public services.

Housing and neighbourhoods are under particular stress as the logic of the market becomes increasingly pervasive. Indeed, the right of disadvantaged groups to decent accommodation and living environments has been severely affected in recent decades. First, the retrenchment of the State from public provision of social services, social housing and investment in public infrastructures has been further advanced by the financial and economic crisis and the austerity measures intended to counteract it. Second, urban transformations and, in particular, policies of urban regeneration have triggered dynamics of displacement of low-income people, exclusion from newly developed places which are oriented toward high-end consumption, and the loss of a sense of belonging and identity.

As a consequence, most European countries are experiencing a housing emergency that includes not only highly visible phenomena like the increase in homelessness and in the squatting component of urban movements, but is also signalled by other trends such as the rise in the number of house evictions or the re-entry of young people in their parents' home, etc. Moreover, the crisis of housing affordability and accessibility is affecting – and is expected to increasingly affect in the future – sections of society previously not regarded as 'vulnerable'. In parallel with shortages in affordable housing there is often an over-supply of high quality apartments and a large stock of vacant or underused housing (second homes, vacation accommodations) while real estate property has increased in real value and yields a very high return, contributing strongly to the general level of social inequality in society. In sum, housing and urban space, once objects of long-term and consistent policy design and implementation, have become both prey to rapacious practices and a source of high returns during this phase of unregulated financial capitalism; hence our interest in looking at the institutional and cultural factors that lie behind the emergence, design and development of forms of social innovation in the urban arena.

These articles engage with the varying characteristics of these needs and the dynamics affecting their development and growth in relation to the restructuring of the welfare and housing systems and the impact of the recent, ongoing financial crisis in specific national and local contexts. First, they show the varying pressure of globalisation on different welfare regimes and the different effects produced, as evidenced by the redefinition of social needs and the consequent reassignment of responsibility for meeting them to the family, the State or the market. Second, the authors analyse the transformation of housing systems, showing how the long-term decline of social housing, the steep rise in ownership levels, sharp increase in housing prices and boom-and- bust housing markets have affected the populations in different ways, in particular the most vulnerable social groups which can no longer afford decent housing (see below, section 2).

This special issue focuses on new responses to existing and emerging needs and exclusionary dynamics. The articles present case studies[i] of innovative practices and policies. They report on policy experimentation at the local level as the various public administrations struggle to meet the new demands; significantly, they also discuss the mobilisation of civil society and the growing role of a range of non-profit organisations engaged in dialogue with public institutions (Loscumes and Le Gàles, 2007). We chose these cases because they illustrate a wide spectrum of policy changes regarding housing that incorporate innovative bottom-up practices.

The case study of Athens was chosen deliberately because it enlarges the scope of innovative practices to include responses to social exclusion in community services and public space. Each case brings a specific and diverse contribution to current debates on policy changes regarding housing and community issues

From the analysis of the dynamics of social exclusion outlined above, we move to an investigation of the differing reactions to these dynamics; the selected cases are of utmost interest because each presents a specific configuration of the structural factors influencing the emergence and development of socially innovative responses to social needs. In each article the changes in the welfare and housing systems resulting from the crisis and the consequent emerging needs are outlined and discussed in relation to socially innovative practices and policies; the lens of social innovation is used here as a conceptual tool for the understanding and assessment of such inclusionary practices and policies (see section 3 below on social innovation).

The articles included here present analyses of innovation in five countries: Austria, Greece, Italy, Slovakia and Spain; in four of them, the site of these practices or policies is a major city: Vienna, Athens, Milan and Barcelona. In Slovakia we selected an innovative housing initiative concerning one of the most marginalised groups, the Roma minority, which was severely impacted by changes in housing policy; in this case the initiative takes place in a small municipality, Rankovce, in the eastern part of the country.

2. Welfare and housing systems in transition and the challenge to respond to new risks

Although highly differentiated among countries, welfare state intervention in the areas of income, health, education or even housing has played a major role in Europe; in the urban social space, the impact of social housing has been very significant in preventing and/or correcting social exclusion and segregation. However, recent neoliberal reforms of welfare and housing systems, on the one hand, and the demographic changes and diversification of household structures that have occurred in recent decades, along with analogous changes in income opportunities by household, are transforming the size and profiles of social groups at risk. From these transformations, new patterns of social inequality have emerged, one based on occupation and ethnicity but also on accessibility to housing. While in the 1990s cities were characterised by a split between a layer of highly-educated employees and a mass of poorly paid and low-skilled workers, frequently migrants, we know today that there are many skilled workers with relatively reasonable incomes who cannot access housing in large and medium-size cities. The 2008 economic crisis has brought a return to insecurity for many more people. In corporatist welfare countries such as Austria, the decline in stable job opportunities in cities has exasperated the discrepancies between the living conditions of citizens and those of immigrants, naturalised minorities, and in particular young people born and educated in the host country but unable to find stable jobs and afford housing rents in the market. In southern European countries, flexibilisation of labour markets is mainly affecting young cohorts, many of them skilled, who find it very difficult to form new households and cannot afford housing prices. In these societies, spatial inequalities are less pronounced because of extensive solidarity networks, formed by the combination of the family, community and voluntary sectors (Body-Gendrot, et al., 2012). In the Central and Eastern transition countries with a large home-ownership market, welfare liberalisation and less stable labour market conditions have meant more social segregation and fewer opportunities for young people.

Welfare re-structuring is taking place in all European welfare regimes, with different emphases and re-adjustments in policy fields. Two parallel strategies have been promoted to reduce welfare costs and improve financial control over the national welfare state: (1) to

decentralise welfare implementation, giving more responsibility to local welfare systems and (2) to promote activation of citizens in building their own social conditions. Both trends imply that local welfare provision is becoming increasingly important; with this come new challenges for local public institutions, families, communities and civil society organisations (Andreotti et al., 2012, 1925-1940).

Nevertheless, public social expenditure as a whole has increased in many European countries as a result of the shrinking of labour participation. The national governments of the five countries represented by the case studies in this special issue have been forced to increase expenditure in income support while restructuring health and pension systems and social services (EUROSTAT, 2011). The countries included in this SI were not the only ones that have experienced changes in the structure of government expenditure. According to OECD data analysis, social protection expenditure, driven by old age pension and including unemployment insurance and disability, has become the largest single item of public expenditure in all OECD members. Moreover, between 2001 and 2011 other factors, such as the high level of public debt requiring substantial interest payments, have affected the shift in spending. In particular, as Table 1 shows, the percentage of government expenditure in housing and community amenities has decreased in the countries discussed in this special issue and in the majority of OECD countries. The governments of Spain, Slovak Republic and Italy have decreased their expenditure more than the OECD average. This lower social investment in housing and community amenities is consistent with the call by governments for a more active role of citizens in the provision of welfare.

Table 1.   Government expenditure in Housing and community amenities

	(2011)	(2001-2011)
Italy	1,4	-0,7
Austria	1,2	-0,3
Spain	1,3	-1,3
Slovak Republic	2,6	-0,8
Greece	0,4	-0,5
OECD-34	1,6	-0,5

*Taken from OECD Government at Glance 2013. Public finance and economics. Structure of general government expenditures, tables 3.25 and 3.26: 77.

Recent transformations in housing systems have been part of a larger restructuring of welfare relations. With the pressure of globalisation, welfare regimes have experienced transformations and, as they continue to do so, their relationships with the national housing systems are also changing (see the analysis of changes in the housing system in the JHBE special

issue 2014, 29). As one major trend has been the re-commodification of some services that were previously de-commodified in areas of health care and social services in many European countries, the re-commodification in the provision of housing has also occurred just when more public housing support is needed.

Historically the socialization of housing provision has encountered considerable barriers, albeit with national differences. Two reasons may explain this trend. One is that housing constitutes a property right, which has assumed an almost "sacred" symbolic value in capitalist societies. Two, housing provision is always available since housing markets exist everywhere, although featuring very different qualities of housing (Harloe, 1995, 536). Housing has been purchased for individual consumption (as first and second residences) but also as a capital investment in a context of more or less constant housing price increases. This capital and consumer function of housing partly explains that housing ownership increased in most EU countries from the beginning of the millennium to 2007. In 2010, 70% of European households owned the house where they lived. The rate is higher than 86% in the 12 new member states. In the countries included in this Special Issue the rates are: 90% in Slovakia; a declining rate from 80% to 79% in Spain and to 77% in Greece (in these two countries the number of owner-occupiers has diminished with the economic crisis); 73% in Italy and 57 % in Austria (Eurostat, 2014; Ranci, et al., 2014, 13)[ii].

Two trends are currently present: housing ownership remains predominant in most EU countries and at the same time, there is a decrease in public social housing, with the exception of France, Austria and Denmark (Housing Statistics in the European Union 2010). The shrinking of social housing and/or publicly protected housing is due to the reduction of public investment in housing programmes, which has led to larger numbers of families on waiting lists and often to more socially excluded people (CECODHAS, 2012). There has also been a concentration effect, with fewer public housing estates for the most deprived in many cities. These exclusionary processes have stronger effects in those societies where other features of the welfare state are missing or have been diminished: in these societies "the symbolic and socioeconomic status of the home and its role in an implicit welfare economy has been enhanced" (Ronald, 2012, 4). In southern European countries, for example, housing ownership is a fundamental capital good as well as a family source for intergenerational solidarity; it has become essential to family welfare because of the low level of protection provided by the welfare state.

With the international financial crisis, associated with a housing bubble, and with the bursting of this bubble in 2007, deep changes have occurred in many countries in the housing sector; as noted earlier, this has affected families that were not in vulnerable circumstances before the crisis. Since then housing affordability has become a major problem in many European cities, especially for young people but also for the unemployed, for some migrants and for the poor. In the last decade the mortgage defaults and evictions have, moreover, added further housing needs. More specifically, the recent economic crisis has brought about an increase in arrears on mortgage payments, in the numbers of housing repossessions and in evictions for failing to pay the monthly rent. The rate of Europeans who are reported as unable to pay a scheduled rent or mortgage payment for accommodation increased from 8% in 2007 to 11% in 2011 (Office of the European Union, 2012). In Spain over 150,000 families have lost their homes and have been left with significant debts owed to the financial institutions. The numbers are much less dramatic in Greece and in Italy where the financing of housing is less dependent on the market and where there is more protection for mortgage holders. As a result, housing evictions are considerably less, even though the number of families not able to pay rent or with mortgage arrears is at a record high (CECODHAS, 2012).

The rise in housing distress has created a new challenge to national, regional and local governments. Some authors argue that the housing crisis is due to the basic inflexibility of the housing stock (Costa et al., 2014, 160) since, paradoxically, there is no shortage of housing in the national markets, which points to a mismatch between housing needs and the supply of housing.

The more acute mismatch between housing supply and the demand for affordable housing in recent years has fuelled the debate concerning housing affordability. Part of the argument is to question the notion of affordability because increasing housing prices with diminishing state subsidies is placing an "unreasonable burden" on household income (Edgar et al., 2002). Arguably there is a case for changing the emphasis in housing debates from a market concept – affordability – to the humanitarian concept of accessibility. By calling for housing accessibility social movements are putting forward the notion of housing as a social right to be guaranteed for every human being (Sendi, 2011, 11). The Spanish case in this Special Issue shows the emergence of an urban social movement claiming housing as a human and social right.

In many cities local authorities have difficulty in coping with this social need. In some countries they have limited possibilities to address the scale of the problems, in part because local policy in relation to housing continues to play only a marginal role. As a result, local housing policies are unable to respond to growing social problems. This circumstance has made some analysts claim the need to focus more on social innovation and policy learning (Costa, et al., 2014, 161). In line with this argument, this Special Issue presents social initiatives emerging from the non-profit sector as examples of innovative programmes in the provision of housing which arise in response to housing needs not satisfied by the market or by traditional public-sector housing. These innovative initiatives have something in common: an increase in the variety of the actors involved in the provision of housing at different levels.

The following cases show different local and national contexts confronting general trends driven by market dynamics. In Slovakia, the transition to a free market economy has brought about a large-scale privatisation of state-owned rental flats, with far-reaching consequences in terms of housing access and affordability, in particular for already deprived social groups. New social housing programmes receive very few economic resources, and subsidies to cover housing costs have very restrictive eligibility criteria, generating as a result a severe shortage of affordable housing. The housing programme for Roma people analysed in this issue is interesting in terms of the target and the actors involved, as it illuminates the conditions and the limits of social innovation in this context. In Austria, we find that despite a long-standing tradition of affordable housing the housing market has become more and more market-driven in recent decades, making it increasingly difficult to find adequate accommodation at reasonable prices. The homeless policy presented here speaks of a reorganization of welfare provision where there is a mutual accommodation between a public responsibility still strongly felt and the opening of the field of social services to not-for-profit providers. In Spain we are seeing the reaction to the over-commodification of the housing market in an economy where it already plays a large role; it has taken the form of a remarkable movement able to influence the governance structure. It is in Greece, however, that the combined effects of the crisis and of the austerity measures adopted to counter it have most drastically reduced the amount of public goods and services while increasing dramatically the social groups suffering from different and combined forms of exclusion. Here social innovation practices work to change goods and services from market to solidarity relations.

3. Social Innovation (SI)

Ours are times of widespread innovative practices, so much so that social innovation is often used as a rhetorical term. This current use should not distract our attention from the important body of analytical and empirical scientific work on social innovation that has been developed in this century (Klein, Harrison 2007; Klein, Laville, Moulaert 2014; Leveque, Fontan, Klein 2014; Moulaert 2009; Moulaert et al 2013, Mulgan et al 2006; Murray, Caulier-Grice, Mulgan 2010, Pirone 2012). Social innovation has been conceptualized as part of a "movement" (à la Polany) to counteract the overwhelming role played by markets and commodification processes (Mingione & Vicari Haddock 2014) in the present phase of capitalist development, where we see not only markets producing social exclusion for larger sectors of the population but also the expulsion of individuals and, to some extent, entire social categories from social and urban systems (Sassen, 2014). In this line of thought, however, a debate is underway regarding the extent to which social innovation can be considered an effective force to counteract social exclusion, and in what way the resilience of welfare state policies is a necessary complement to social innovation (Mingione, Vicari, 2014; Martinelli, 2013). In a complementary theoretical framework, social innovation responds to the challenge of social cohesion and the need to reconstruct social ties in societies that are increasingly fragmented and individualized. Social innovation performs the function of changing social relationships in the direction of increasing social capital, providing resources for empowerment and bottom-up organization. Strongly connected to this framework is a third conceptualization of social innovation, which is concerned with the problems of contemporary democratic regimes. In this context, the practices of self-organization and direct democracy are seen as responses on the one hand to the crisis of political parties and traditional agencies of political demand collection, and on the other to the demands of increasingly large social areas that are deprived of political representation: migrants, precarious workers, marginal and/or alienated people. From this perspective, social innovation serves to counteract the "democratic deficit" in contemporary governance systems.

We draw on the multiple theoretical frameworks that have developed the concept of social innovation in analytical terms and deploy a specific reading of this concept that emphasizes three constitutive elements. First, practices are considered socially innovative if they contribute to satisfying basic human needs that remain unmet by the State or the market. Second, satisfaction of these demands occurs thanks to a change taking place in the governance system that steers and regulates the allocation of goods and services meant to satisfy them; as needs are recognized as legitimate, new organizations and resources are put in place to respond to them and new alliances are forged across a multi-level governance system. It is indeed a change in power relations in the direction of a wider inclusion in decision-making processes and of greater social justice in the distribution of resources. Third, the change in the governance system is the result of a process of individual and community empowerment; participative methods, sharing knowledge and open negotiation enable citizens to enroll as full actors in the definition and the implementation of the responses to their needs. Social innovation entails a greater capacity of agency and participation of previously excluded or deprived individuals and groups.

Following this conceptualization, the articles in this Special Issue analyze innovative practices with respect to the specific definition of the need they address and the social exclusion dynamics that can be said to produce that need; they identify the actors that are mobilized at different institutional levels, and examine the extent of re-distribution of material and immaterial resources.   The analyses take a medium-range time perspective, which sheds light on the impact of the crisis in a specific context and on the interaction of these innovative practices with the

changes in the national and local context, in particular as far as the welfare and housing systems are concerned.

Social innovation is then assessed along two dimensions: the degree of institutionalization of innovative practices, and the value orientation they present. The process of institutionalization concerns the mutual recognition between the State and civil society associations and organizations achieving a certain degree of stability; this process induces innovation in public policies and influences public discourse as far as the problems in the agenda setting and the solutions are concerned. We analyze innovative practices and policies together, because we are interested, above all, in the process of bringing new or alternative values into the public sphere, independently of the level of (formal) institutionalization. The value orientation, which is the foundation of the actors' motivation, the "fuel", so to speak, of social innovation (Vicari Haddock & Tornaghi 2013), concerns the degree to which the action is oriented toward progressive social change, i.e. social justice, equity, democracy and empowerment. This value orientation signals the presence of alternative models vis-à-vis those that privilege the market economy, representative democracy, traditional cultural values, etc.; instead, these models are centred on non-profit economic activities, the empowerment of people and their direct involvement in decision-making processes, the pursuit of social justice, equal opportunities and gender equality.

In the article on Austria, we see social innovation deployed in an attempt to address the phenomenon of homelessness; in this case, a social service provider defined a new discourse and implemented new ways of delivering services to meet the needs of this particularly deprived group. In doing so, the project relied on the interest of a public administration that was already significantly open and supportive of innovative practices in the field. The case also shows interesting modifications in the governance system in the direction of more inclusive deliberative processes between the public administration and all service providers. Homeless people, although not directly involved in the design and implementation of the project, can be seen as benefitting from a strategy based on respect for personal autonomy and individual responsibility.

Two articles deal with self-construction as a way to provide for people in need of housing. Social innovation is here a matter of the direct involvement of people in collective undertakings that build social capital and individual capacities. The Slovakian case shows a higher degree of involvement of the targeted Roma population in the planning, design and implementation of the project compared to the Italian case where the end-users, autochthonous and migrant families, are involved in the project mainly as providers of labour. Nevertheless, the social innovation content is strong in both cases, as the project empowers people with new, marketable skills and forges new partnerships in the governance system.

The article on Greece and Athens informs us about social innovation in an exceptional context where resource constraints and unmet needs are at a very high level. It is in this context that we see the mobilization of civil society and the development of a wide array of initiatives as a result of collective actions nourished by values of solidarity and social justice. As a result, alternative models of service provision are organized at the local level, but with different links with higher spatial scale; these alternative models and discourses reflect a significant re-definition in the meanings of urban space and the public sphere.

A similar mobilization of organized citizens, including social groups not usually politically active, is reported in the article about Spain. The mobilization gave rise to different initiatives and eventually to a powerful movement for the protection of people who have lost their homes because of the housing crisis in this country. Of particular interest are the ways through which

socially innovative practices become institutionalized, i.e. achieve recognition, legitimacy and support from public authorities, including international institutions.

4. Governance in housing and community spaces

In Europe, national states continue to be key actors in the provision of welfare and housing despite the decentralisation process which has taken place or is taking place everywhere. Since the beginning of the financial crisis, national states have regained power to influence local policies through the imposition of fiscal austerity. Thus even if much-needed innovation in the areas of housing and community welfare takes place at the local level (Moulaert, et al., 2013), the national state continues to be a key actor in providing financial and regulatory resources. This means that local institutions dealing with housing and community needs must continue developing responses to avoid further social exclusion while at the same time negotiating financial arrangements with regional and national governments. This (new) policy context has created new scenarios of governance dynamics, which are theorized in the literature as vertical multi-level or multi-scale governance. Moreover, in order to cope with housing and community needs local administrations are increasingly relying on the contribution of other actors such as NGOs, for-profit associations or active citizens organised for specific social needs. As a result, in addition to negotiations developed vertically, new horizontal governance configurations develop among diverse actors attending to housing and welfare needs. Finally, in the provision of social housing, the sector has moved towards more contractual relationships between the commissioning authority and increasingly independent providers. The policy emphasis has thus shifted from redistribution to regulation and risk management (EUROFOUND, 2006).

Governance - defined as a process of coordinating actors, social groups and institutions to reach collectively discussed objectives - not only raises the question of democratic legitimacy (Le Galès, 2002) but concerns what takes place beyond an organisation, namely the ability to organise collective action and to build coalitions and partnerships. The negotiational character of urban governance has sometimes obscured the interplay of social interests and masked power relations. However, with the financial and economic crisis a more compelling context has emerged in which policy objectives and policy instruments have in many instances been questioned. Despite the normative discourses that have linked governance with social cohesion (in the sense of achieving social harmony) in European cities, struggles about citizenship reveal the growing complexity involved in attempts to achieve social cohesion (Novy et al., 2012). While at the beginning of the 21st century issues of social injustice and inequality became less visible in political and policy discourses that emphasised social cohesion (Harloe, 2001, 889), more recently increasing social inequality and urban exclusionary processes have begun to force new policy agendas.

The act of governance involves institutions but also "reflexive self-organization of interdependent actors" who may disagree with mainstream policy (Jessop, 2002) in the ways in which social and economic problems are addressed. Organised citizens may also challenge policy discourses regarding the achievement of social cohesion in cities that ignore power relations and access to social rights. Institutions and organised citizens, therefore, engage in the restructuring of different policy fields in various ways, not only by following a normative top-down interpretation of governance. In this sense governance also includes alternative mechanisms of negotiation between various groups and networks, potentially empowering citizens and social groups (Garcia, 2006; Gerometta et al., 2005; Leubolt et al., 2009). In these governance processes citizens may present alternative creative strategies, such as innovation in the provision of housing and in the governance of housing provision. However, studies show that in order to go beyond implementing *ad hoc* programmes and force changes in regulations and policies, organised citizens need to

develop multi-scalar alliances and networks, even at the international level, to gather support and visibility from regional and central governments (Moulaert, et al., 2013; Martinelli, 2013).

The cases presented in this Special Issue show a variety of governance dynamics as responses to the challenge of providing housing and supporting community needs. These dynamics often involve *path dependence* relations between local institutions and organizations with a long history of cooperation, as the case in Vienna shows. In other situations bottom-up initiatives from civil society organizations and NGO actors and top-down policies from institutions, both aiming to cover housing needs, interact; in the cases of Milan, Vienna and Rankovce cooperation between NGO actors and public institutions leads to consensus, whereas in the Barcelona case, conflict dominates. These forms of cooperation between civil society groups and local institutions in innovative programmes to answer social needs have been conceptualised as bottom-linked social innovation (Pradel, et al., 2013). In these cases the role of institutions is crucial for the sustainability of the innovative programme. However, the Athens cases presented in this issue show that in some circumstances citizens are left to their own devices without the support of institutions, which means that public policy actors and instruments have been replaced by social and community solidarity organizations and informal social initiatives.

The questions that arise from the collection of the Special Issue cases are the following: Do innovative practices in housing and community issues require the cooperation between civil society, public institutions, and market actors in order to achieve the objectives of social and housing inclusion in contexts in which housing affordability and accessibility have become problematic? Should policy instruments be redesigned? What can be learned from these cases in terms of policy governance?

The Florian Wukovitsch et al. paper on the Vienna case shows the way *Housing First* was introduced in Vienna in 2012 as a pilot programme within the public and private coordinated system of low-rent housing provision. The *Housing First* project is a response to demand for affordable housing in the face of housing price increases over the last few decades. Moreover, *Housing First* was introduced with the principle of housing accessibility for the homeless, i.e. housing as a social right. The two main governance actors are: the city's organization for the co-ordination of social service delivery (FSW) and the management of social funds, and one small service provider in the field of giving assistance to homeless people in Vienna (*neunerhaus).* This organization runs several emergency accommodation facilities and houses for temporary living but also provides social assistance and medical services. The cooperation of these organizations in the *Housing First* project has enabled new governance principles to emerge concerning the participation and autonomy of clients. But it has also provoked debates about housing accessibility criteria for targeted groups and proposals to develop a more coordinated approach among providers of social housing for homeless people. From this case a change emerges in the way housing governance is conceptualised to accommodate new actors and a more inclusive principle of housing supply.

The Milan cases show contrasting governance dynamics in which the initiator of a housing provision model is an NGO that obtains support from municipal governments in the region to implement self-built housing for immigrants and low-income families. In their paper Michela Semprebon and Serena Vicari Haddock show the governance constraints in the implementation of otherwise innovative solutions in line with the current trend of giving civil society and citizens in general more responsibility in the provision of "active community welfare" (Annette & Mayo, 2010). These Italian cases exemplify mixed governance between public institutions (the Lombardy Region, the Province of Milan, municipalities) and two local actors (the Alisei NGO and a private

company). Moreover, as the housing occupiers are also directly involved in the construction of the houses with their labour and organisational capacity, this bottom-linked case appears as a successful model for cutting housing production costs, enhancing user empowerment and producing social capital in the process. What, if any, are the limitations which the structure of governance places on the potential to transform a successful pilot example into a housing policy? In this case, as in other cases in other countries, rigidity in regulations and partisan political interests interfere in the sustainability of innovative practices, which reinforces the view that politics matter in policy. More specifically, the dialogue between civil society actors and multi-level governance appears fraught with difficulty and thus unable to ensure the sustainability of programmes. However, the Milan cases show possible choices in a more flexible governance context in Italy and in other countries.

In Slovakia Gábor Szüdi and Jaroslava Kovácová present the case of "Building Hope", a local programme initiated by a non-profit organization – ETP Slovakia - known for its cooperation with Roma communities. This organization, which is present in several community centres, is the main stakeholder in the pilot project. From a governance perspective this programme has covered the housing needs of a part of the Roma population not covered by social housing policies through developing a strong network capacity within and beyond the Roma community. The programme has been implemented in a locality (Rankovce) where the mayor is a member of the Roma community. Other key members of ETP Slovakia also have strong links with one of the churches and with prominent associations as well as with the media. The visibility in the public sphere of the main stakeholder of the Building Hope project has provided enough legitimacy to be acknowledged by the regional government. It remains to be seen if the present pressure to obtain further support from the national government will consolidate this housing programme into a viable and durable policy option.

In the Spanish case Julie De Weerdt and Marisol Garcia show the emergence of the PAH (Platform of Mortgage Victims) movement in Barcelona in 2009 and its rapid spread all over Spain in response to the exclusionary housing processes. This case illustrates several different aspects of governance dynamics. First, the negative impact of a combination of regulations: (a) the relaxation of the central bank supervision of mortgage provision; (b) fiscal incentives to buy homes and (c) the law (dating from 1911) that stipulates the permanence of outstanding debt even after housing repossession. Second, the movement's organisational capacities have produced a creative bottom-up governance process that, after having achieved support at the neighbourhood level, has managed to scale up into city, regional, national and European public spheres. The movement has scored high levels of legitimacy in Spanish public opinion and reached European institutions that have forced the Spanish government to take policy action. Third, partly in response to effective campaigns, financial institutions and public institutions have modified some governance regulations concerning mortgage payment conditions. Fourth, the movement has entered into dialogue and cooperation with local and regional public administrations, which in turn have developed internal and external instruments of cooperation among themselves in order to deal with the housing needs of the affected population. Overall, this is a case of bottom-linked multiple governance innovation in response to an acute housing crisis.

The case presented by Dina Vaiou and Ares Kalandides contributes to a long research tradition on policy and politics at the neighbourhood level. Patterns of policy intervention targeted at neighbourhoods have been widely researched in the American and European context. Stories of collective action from local communities to deal with urban renewal have been prolific, too (Horak and Blokland, 2012, 255-267). The distinctive contribution of this Athens case is the analysis of practices of survival, solidarity and resistance in a European city, which seem ultimately to reshape

the public sphere during and following the crisis. The fields of action range from educational facilities to communal cooking, exemplifying what community needs and community support involve. Solidarity networks, such as "Myrmigi" are examples of organized citizens operating as welfare providers with material resources collected from other citizens. Or, the "Hellinikon Social Medical Ward and Social Pharmacy (MKIE)" network of doctors that provide health care on a voluntary basis. The actors involved in these practices are redefining the concept of the public sphere, going beyond political participation to include welfare socialization. From a governance perspective these cases show challenging situations for institutional policy implementation and for developing instruments with the input of bottom-up collective action.

In this Special Issue the capacity of the innovative cases to make an impact on the governance of housing and on community spaces in each of the cities emphasises four aspects: (1) the difficult shift in policy discourse from housing affordability to housing accessibility; (2) the different degrees of empowerment of citizens through the provision of material and immaterial resources to individuals and communities to tackle social exclusion dynamics; (3) the importance of accessing the local public sphere even if sustainable innovation often involves going beyond the local level. In urban renewal policies carried out in European cities during recent decades, the influence of regional, national and even supranational administrations has been crucial; and (4) the problematisation of existing regulations and ways of governing housing. The cases presented, while not portrayed as "best practices", nevertheless constitute innovative practices that push for new policy instruments. In this sense they are intended to contribute to current debates on governance adjustment and policy changes (Lascoumes and Le Gàles, 2007).

This Issue thus looks specifically at innovative practices arising in response to exclusionary processes and their contribution to current debates on policy changes. In European cities some of these practices pay greater attention to empowering citizens and look for their cooperation in actions which combine the physical regeneration of the built environment with responses to social needs. Among these practices it is possible to find innovation in two directions: the first is innovation in the redefinition and response to various needs (here in relation to housing and community) and the second is innovation in governance itself, when these practices foster participation, progressive values and alternative models of socio-economic development (Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Middleton et al., 2005; Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Murie, 2004; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008).

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[i] The case studies included in this Special Issue have been selected from a larger sample of socially innovative practices and policies which were presented and discussed during the work of the COST Action IS1102, "Social services, welfare state and places". We are grateful for the support of the COST programme and would like to acknowledge the contribution of all experts participating in this specific Action and to thank in particular Professor Flavia Martinelli, the Chair of the Action, for her strong support.

ii It should be always stressed that aggregate owner occupation percentages are poor and potentially misleading indicators if considered as measures of housing need satisfaction. Some countries still have a large number of owner-occupied dwellings, especially in more rural areas, which are of a low standard and inadequately serviced. It is thus arguable that a certain amount of housing needs remains unmet even within the percentage of housing ownership, which reinforces the argument regarding increasing difficulties in terms of access to decent housing.