

7. Housing in a post-Covid society: trends, policies and challenges

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Format: traditional (call for abstracts and individual presentations of around 15 minutes)

The outbreak of Covid-19 in the beginning of 2020 has brought in new housing-related issues and challenges which add to and amplify pre-existing ones. Housing and health issues have always been strictly connected. Indeed, back to the beginning of 20th century, the development of social housing was also meant to tackle substandard living conditions of most urban dwellers, including newly formed urban working class. The massive state-led social housing production that started during the so called “thirty glorious years” provided access to housing on a large scale. This golden age for social housing, which had been governed almost entirely by public action, came to an end since the mid–1970s when the restructuring of the labour market and reduction in welfare investments under the influence of neo-liberal politics resulted in social housing being increasingly residual. Concerns about the growing social exclusion of its inhabitants led state actor to launch large scale urban renewal programmes aimed at increasing social mix through tenure diversification. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, the 21st century was already posing several urgent housing-related challenges for contemporary cities, including growing socio-economic inequalities reflected in rising levels of residential segregation, increasing commodification of housing, the crisis of housing affordability affecting a pool of different social categories. Facing the weakening role of social housing in responding to complex housing needs, a growing number of innovative community-led initiatives re-emerged to tackle housing affordability issues.

We invite theoretical reflections and empirical contributions on the following themes:

- 1) The lockdown has forced millions of people to stay in their homes. The home has then acquired a central dimension in everyday lives. How have people negotiated the internal and external domestic place? How have unequal availability of spaces and overcrowding conditions impacted the everyday life activities? How have neighbours’ relationships and the use of shared space played out in times of isolation?
- 2) The confinement has amplified existing differences in housing conditions. Besides reflecting existing inequalities among those who can benefit from ‘a roof over their head’, this pandemic suggests us to reflect on the harder living conditions experienced by those who suffer from extreme housing deprivation: rough sleepers, people living in informal settlements and overcrowded places. How has the lockdown impacted the lives of

people in extreme forms of housing deprivation? Which implications for their health conditions and which impacts on the reproduction of health inequalities?

3) By forcing many economic activities to 'shut down', the lockdown has led to an increase in the number of people who are at the risk of losing their job. The rising uncertainty about households' income stability exacerbates the problem of affordability in both social and private housing sectors, reinforcing tenure insecurity and eviction as households increasingly struggle to meet the housing costs (either rent or mortgage). The crisis of affordability is likely to be widespread involving an array of different household typologies. In this light, how will the Covid-led economic crisis impact households' capacity to afford their homes? Which social profiles will be mostly affected?

4) The current crisis is also providing an opportunity for the public actor to support households in need by introducing specific measures to mitigate the impact of the lockdown on the capacity to maintain the dwelling (e.g. through rent moratorium). In a similar vein, in many national and local contexts we have observed the rise of social movements aiming to safeguard people' right to housing through bottom up strategies like rent strike. How have public policies at both national and local level addressed the new housing challenges? Which outcomes have grassroots movements achieved for the most vulnerable residents?