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Housing vulnerabilities unravelled

impact of housing policy changes on Dutch households that have difficulties making ends meet

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Book of Abstracts

Housing vulnerabilities unravelled: impact of housing policy changes on Dutch households that have difficulties making ends meet

23. Social Housing and Globalisation

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The Dutch recessions of 2009, 2012 and 2013 kicked off a series of spending cuts in the social welfare mix. In housing, government had started its retreat about the same time by more strictly defining the tasks for social rental housing providers and by creating a less strict rent control system to provide more attractive investment opportunities for non-social investors. At the same time, government started promoting the participation society, intending to shift responsibilities for personal initiatives to citizens by moving in the direction of a safety net welfare mix for those that cannot take part in the new society.

The right to an adequate standard of housing in combination with more bureaucratic access to housing allowance was being compromised for the Rotterdam citizens, according to our participants in the discussion groups (2017) who had difficulty making ends meet. Based on the observation that housing in the city is becoming a luxury good, they observed a shift in the right to housing from a universal one to a residual one (Bengtsson, 2001). The more difficult access to decent housing, therefore, is curtailing participants' freedoms to choose the life they value in terms of their capability set (Sen, 1999).

The participative case study of the RE-InVEST project in the Netherlands aimed to unravel the housing vulnerabilities based on an anthropological conception of the capability approach developed by Bonvin & Laruffa (2007). The participants indicated in which roles they had become more vulnerable and in which roles they identified opportunity to reduce their housing vulnerabilities: what they themselves could do to increase their freedoms to choose their housing (the doer), how they could voice their concerns (the evaluator) and to what extent they are recipient of support (the receiver) by other actors, such as local or national government or social landlords.

The study concludes that developments on the Dutch housing market have left relatively untouched the position of sitting tenants and owner-occupiers. However, outsiders increasingly can no longer move into central urban areas because of a lack of affordable and adequate housing. The participants considered this gap between insiders and outsiders also as one between the past/present resulting in a reduction of resources and their future position in which this reduction has to be compensated by collective action and voice in order to strengthen their freedoms to choose.

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