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'Thou shalt be a (more) responsible tenant': exploring innovative management strategies in changing social housing contexts

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Abstract

The nature of housing management has often been contested between two main orientations, business-like (i.e. economic efficiency) and social welfare (i.e. social support), reflecting the dual identity of social housing providers, as both private enterprises and welfare promoters. Research shows that housing management is particularly susceptible to transformations in the broader social housing sector. Considering the last two decades, the demand for social housing has increased across Western Europe, involving different social categories, e.g. low-middle income and, more recently, asylum seekers. On the supply side, housing providers have become keener to involve residents in delivering and managing housing-related services. This paper explores how innovative management strategies are emerging in the context of broader changes in social rented sectors and welfare policies in countries characterised by different typologies of housing systems, Italy and the Netherlands. By means of case studies and semi-structured interviews, this paper scrutinizes specific management approaches, i.e. Integrated Social Management and self-management, in two recent social housing projects in Milan and Amsterdam, which target socially mixed tenants, i.e. status-holders, low-income and young locals. Despite several differences, management approaches in both cases aim to increase tenants' responsabilisation but with different focus: towards the community, i.e. social integration of vulnerable tenants in the housing project (Dutch case), and towards individual dwellings, i.e. boosting individuals' self-agency in relation to the maintenance of properties (Italian case). This paper discusses how distinct, and sometimes normative, premises underlying tenants participation in housing management shape specific relationships between residents and housing providers.

Keywords Amsterdam · Collaborative housing · Co-production · Housing management · Milan · Mixed communities · Self-management · Self-organisation · Social housing

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1 Introduction

Housing management is strongly related to transformations in social housing, e.g. increasing market orientation of property management, changing demand, residualisation (Priemus et al. 1999), and governments' reforms (Walker 2000). Housing managers have always relied on normative approaches in their activity, aiming to prescribe 'desirable' norms of conduct, tackle anti-social behaviours, or increase social control (Damer 2000; Flint 2006). Since the 1980s, facing increasing residualisation of social housing, which resulted in higher concentration of low-income households in the lowest-quality estates, urban policies to create 'mixed communities' have encouraged the presence of middle-class residents in deprived neighbourhoods, envisaging them as 'role models' able to lift up the condition of more disadvantaged groups (Manzi 2010), yet without self-evident results (Bolt and Van Kempen 2013).

Over the last two decades, social rented systems in Western Europe have been experiencing transformations in relation to the (growing) demand for social housing and the nature, scope and organisational structure of housing providers (Czischke et al. 2012). The scarce availability of adequate affordable housing has become a key issue involving a mixture of different social categories: young people, low-income and vulnerable households and, more recently, asylum seekers. Facing decreased public funding and increasing privatisation processes, social housing providers in Europe have become more 'hybrid' in the way they deliver and manage affordable housing solutions (Mullins et al. 2012). Many recent 'alternative' forms of housing provision, such as collaborative housing, are driven by the intention to combine affordable housing provision (and fulfilling organisations' core mission in this respect) with opportunities for social inclusion and support for communities, enhancing organisations' social welfare role (Czischke 2018). Recent research in the Dutch and Italian social housing contexts highlighted peculiar forms of affordable housing provision for mixed groups featured by specific housing management strategies. One example is self-management, which assigns tenants wider responsibilities in relation to community building and social integration of most vulnerable tenants, such as status-holders (Costarelli et al. 2019; Czischke and Huisman 2018).

The aim of this paper is to get a deeper understanding on the consequences that such transformations have on housing management. To account for the differences in terms of size, housing providers and overarching housing policy framework, which characterise social rented sectors in EU (Czischke 2009), we focused on Italy and the Netherlands as they belong to distinct typologies of rental markets (dualist versus unitary). This paper considers specific housing management strategies: the self-management (*Zelfbeheer* in Dutch) in the Netherlands and the Integrated Social Management (*Gestione Sociale Integrata* in Italian) in Italy, which are partially an outcome of transformations in social housing and welfare policy. Integrated Social Management in Italy is associated to a particular type of social housing supply, called Housing Sociale, which has been introduced in 2009 to address the need of affordable housing for low-middle income groups, including young people. As will be explained, this housing supply adds to pre-existing publicly supplied rental housing, which proved unable to cater for such growing demand. Self-management in the Netherlands emerges in the context of recent re-orientation in welfare policy to encourage citizens' self-organisation (the 'Participation Society'), coupled with a set of reforms (Social Support Act and Housing Act) which entered into force in 2015, and new migration inflows (the 'refugee crisis') which partially contributed to changes in the demand from and provision of social housing towards more vulnerable social groups.

The lack of affordable housing in itself is neither the cause nor the only reason for housing providers to adopt innovative management styles. It represents the context in which these specific management approaches have emerged. The research questions are: how are innovative approaches to social housing management, i.e. Integrated Social Management and self-management, emerging in the context of current transformations in social rented sectors in Italy and the Netherlands? How do such approaches unfold in the two contexts and what are the implications for residents and professionals and their relationships? Considering the recent rise and innovation of such management strategies, an explorative approach, based on qualitative case study analysis, is the most appropriate research strategy and has been adopted to address our research questions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the topic of social housing management, highlighting the main transformations since the 1980s in relation to professionalization and residualisation. Section 3 describes the main current developments within social rented sectors in Europe with a specific focus on the on-going trends in the national and local research contexts of Italy and Milan, as well as the Netherlands and Amsterdam. Section 4 presents the research methodology and a description of case studies. Section 5 presents the findings of our empirical analysis, organised in three subsections focussing on (i) types of housing management, (ii) tenants involvement in housing management activities, and (iii) relationships between professionals and tenants. Section 6 provides a discussion and conclusion of the paper.

2 What is (social) housing management?

Defined as “the set of all activities to produce and allocate housing services from the existing social housing stock” (Priemus et al. 1999, p. 211), the management of social housing, as synonymous of social housing management, can be divided into four main categories: *technical*, *social*, *financial*, and *tenure* management. Social landlords, housing associations, cooperatives, but also local housing authorities and social workers are typically responsible for housing management activities (*ibidem*).

The nature and scope of housing management have been often contested between a business-like orientation, which focuses on economic efficiency and sustainability goals, and a social welfare-oriented approach, that is providing care and support for vulnerable tenants (Franklin and Clapham 1997). This tension originates from the dual identity of social housing organizations as both private enterprises and promoters of social welfare (Flint and Kearns 2006). Despite the philanthropic motives and commitments to social reform that underlined the pioneering social welfare approaches to housing management since the 19th century, practices like surveillance and patrolling were strongly permeated by social control aims that were meant to secure the social reproduction of existing power relations of industrial capitalism (Damer 2000).

2.1 The managerial turn of the 1980s

Social housing management has been subject to profound changes since the 1980s. On the one hand, the increasing inflow of lower-income groups in social rented sectors, i.e. residualisation, coupled with shortcomings in the quality of certain estates have caused growing concerns for liveability, noise nuisance, vandalism, drug dealing, crime and insecurity (Priemus et al. 1999). On the other hand, social housing sectors experienced growing

professionalization and business culture orientation. The promotion of an ‘entrepreneurial rhetoric’, the adoption of ‘corporate ethos’ and rationalistic methods of management resulted in increasing pressure for social housing organisations to reach efficient financial management (Manzi 2010; Walker 2000).

The simultaneous occurrence of the two trends, i.e. increasing business-like orientation of housing managers and growing residualisation, challenged social housing organisations in a way that the provision of social welfare services was ‘squeezed out’ to meet more tangible organisational outputs, right at the moment when the increasing presence of the poorest groups in social housing required more care and assistance (Walker 2000).

On top of that, since the 1980s, the social rented sector in EU has gone through massive cutbacks of public funding. In this context, many social housing providers widened their scope to include a set of profit-making opportunities in higher rent and owner-occupied housing market segments, and other commercial activities that were used to finance their social welfare-oriented activities, such as community development, employment training, youth projects, tenant participation. These activities have been conceptualised differently, from ‘housing plus agenda’ to ‘non-landlord activities’ (Czischke 2009).

In an overall sentiment that residualisation trends made the social housing sector more difficult to manage, especially due to the proliferation of anti-social behaviours, more intensive and normative social management activities were implemented by housing managers, including more careful selection of target groups, mixed housing allocation, and greater commitment to stimulate tenants’ participation and their involvement in housing management (Manzi 2010; Haworth and Manzi 1999; Priemus et al. 1999).

2.2 Social housing management and mixed communities

In many EU countries, social housing associations have joined forces with local authorities to implement integrated urban renewal policies on neighbourhood-level to increase the level of social mix through tenure diversification strategies (Van Gent et al. 2009). Policy-makers assumed that a greater presence of ‘role model’ middle-income groups in deprived neighbourhoods would help addressing anti-social behaviours more effectively, highlighting a strong normative element underlying the policy of ‘mixed communities’.

Contemporary approaches to housing management in mixed communities rely on cultural and social control discourses. On the one hand, the cultural approach promotes changes in behaviours through greater residents involvement in daily decisions. On the other hand, the social control approach rests on the influence of peer-group to conform low-income residents to shared social norms (Manzi 2010). The introduction of social mix policy in deprived neighbourhoods has been seen by several authors as a form of state-led gentrification (Bridge et al. 2012).

Research suggests that mixed communities need careful, thorough and preventive management strategies if they are to be successful. These include a wide range of housing management practices, stemming from inclusive participatory planning (Tersteeg and Pinkster 2016), investments in community development (Camina and Wood 2009), and care of dwellings and common areas (Bolt and van Kempen 2013). The success of social mixing policy also depends on the wider context in which this strategy takes place, e.g. economic recession and residualisation in social housing (Bolt and van Kempen 2013).

The next section provides an overview of the current situation of social housing in EU with a focus on current trends in social housing provision in Italy and the Netherlands, including emerging challenges in terms of housing management.

3 Current developments in social housing across Europe

Social housing sectors across Europe benefitted from large state financial contributions in the post-war period, which started declining since the late 1970s, and sharply reduced as consequence of post-2007 GFC austerity measures (Scanlon et al. 2015). Still, the state exercises remarkable influence and direction in social housing sectors (Mullins et al. 2018).

Social housing providers now face fewer resources vis-à-vis greater responsibilities. They are pushed to reshape their organisation, methods of financing, types of housing provided, conditions of tenancies, including the degree of residents involvement (Scanlon et al. 2015; Czischke 2018). In this regard, many non-profit housing providers have been defined as 'hybrid organisations' since they blend the characteristics of state, market, and community organisations. Hybridity can be reflected in the mix of public and private funding, public supervision of private institutions and tenant involvement in management decision-making (Mullins et al. 2018).

Currently, in Europe, affordability and social inclusion represent crucial drivers of several 'hybrid' or 'alternative' forms of housing provision, which are generally referred to as collaborative housing. Characterised by high degree of user participation and self-organisation, the establishment of reciprocal relationships, mutual help and solidarity, these typologies of housing provision emerge in the broader context of top-down attempts to boost inclusive societies and promote active citizenship, e.g. the Big Society and Localism agendas in the UK (Czischke 2018). In this sense, many housing providers envisage residents as both producers and consumers of housing-related services (residents-users), overcoming typically post-war visions of residents as passive 'beneficiaries' of social housing, or as 'customers' as it was under the influence of the 'New Public Management' in the 1980s. A relevant concept in this context is co-production, which from a public management perspective is defined as "the arrangement where individual citizens produce their own services in full or part with public service professionals" (Pestoff and Brandsen 2013, p. 5). In the context of collaborative housing, co-production indicates an experience wherein groups of like-minded residents and providers cooperate in full or in part in the process of housing production and delivery (Czischke 2018).

The next section provides a closer examination at two specific national and local contexts, Italy and Milan, the Netherlands and Amsterdam, where social housing systems are featured by different structural conditions and are currently subject to profound transformations.

3.1 Italy and Milan

Two main typologies of below-market price housing supply currently exist in Italy: a full publicly supplied rental sector (*Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica*) and a public-privately supplied offer for rent and sale (*Housing Sociale*). The former dates back to the early 1900s and accounts for less than 5% of total housing stock. Publicly supplied rental housing accommodates about 750,000 low-income households (Pittini et al. 2017). The stock is owned and managed by regional-based public housing companies, whose mission and core task are closely linked to a public service obligation, i.e. building and managing dwellings for the lowest-income groups, with restricted non-landlord activities (Czischke 2009).

Since the 1990s, the sharp reduction of state funding to public housing sector, coupled with privatisation through right-to-buy schemes and growing residualisation,

resulted in exacerbating safety, liveability and management-related issues (e.g. crime, vandalism, drug dealing, squatting, degradation of built environment, social segregation of inhabitants) in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Early 21st century urban renewal policies (*Contratti di Quartiere*) attempted to ameliorate the physical and social conditions in several public housing neighbourhoods, also through social mixing, yet a systematic review of the effects of such policies is missing.

Currently, the public housing sector is not able to cater for the growing housing demand, not only by the poorest social groups (e.g. evicted people, lower-income, immigrant households), but also by young people and low-middle income households, particularly in the largest cities. Totally, there are about 650 thousand pending applications for social housing in the municipal waiting lists (Pittini et al. 2017).

A second typology of below-market price housing supply, known as Housing Sociale, was set up in 2009, through a National Housing Plan (*Piano Nazionale di Edilizia Abitativa*) that introduced new financing mechanisms based on a system of real estate investment funds, the so-called Integrated System of Funds (*Sistema Integrato di Fondi*). It consists of a national fund (*Fondo Investimenti per l'Abitare*) investing public and private capital into local funds that are managed by external companies specialised in investment management (*società di gestione del risparmio* in Italian). Local funds can be involved in one or more housing development plans, usually mixing different tenures (for sale, social rented, intermediate rented) and functions (residential and commercial).

Considered as a turning point in the history of Italian housing policy, the peculiarity of Housing Sociale lies in the combination between profitability and sociability, which is linked to its definition as Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI) (Fontana and Larena Faccini 2015). As such, the management of both property and social aspects are crucial aspects for Housing Sociale to the extent that a specific housing management approach, so-called Integrated Social Management (*Gestione Sociale Integrata*), is promoted. The idea is that “new development and management strategies are shaping innovative approaches to respond to a growing demand for more inclusive and sustainable—that is, more collaborative—way of urban living” (Ferri et al. 2019, p. 59).

The current geographical distribution of Housing Sociale projects is uneven across the country, showing an overrepresentation in Northern Regions, i.e. where the potential of profitability for investors is high. As matter of fact, the region Lombardy, and its capital city Milan, concentrate a remarkable number of Housing Sociale initiatives compared to other sites. In addition, it is in this region that the Integrated System of Funds was first ‘tested’ around 2004, before being scaled up at national level in 2009.

Lombardy’s capital city, Milan, benefits from relatively large public housing stock compared to Italian average (10% vs 5%). However, it is still not enough to meet the increasing demand (estimated 22,000 pending applications on Municipal waiting lists), also because of mismanagement issues and high vacancy rates in certain public housing estates which hamper the possibility to meet more demand. At the same time, thanks to relatively higher numbers and levels of jobs opportunities compared to other Italian cities, Milan is attractive for a wide share of young people who are employed in key sectors of the local economy (Pareja-Eastaway et al. 2011).

Given the insufficient availability of public housing and the unaffordable prices on the private market, youngsters struggle to find adequate housing solutions in the city, increasing the expectations on Housing Sociale as a potential way to cope with local housing crisis. The next section looks at current developments in the Dutch social housing sector.

3.2 The Netherlands and Amsterdam

Established around 1860 and regulated by the Housing Act (*Woningwet*) since 1901, the Dutch social rented stock is among the largest and oldest in Europe. The main providers are housing associations (*woningcorporaties*), roughly 400 private entities working under the government legal framework through the Housing Act, which are responsible for the provision and management of about 2 million social housing dwellings (approximately 30% of the overall Dutch housing stock). Housing associations also develop their own non-landlord activities, stemming from community development to urban regeneration. The progressive reduction of state funding to the Dutch social housing sector, as part of broader welfare state retrenchment, culminated in the financial liberalisation of this sector in the 1990s, which made housing associations more reliant on commercial activities to cross-subsidize social housing production and non-landlord activities, including urban regeneration (Czischke 2009).

Among other local institutional actors, housing associations have always played a key role as 'neighbourhood managers', being committed to guarantee 'balance', 'harmony' and 'liveability' in residential areas. As residualisation processes in social housing led to larger concentration of low-income and ethnic minorities households in many deprived Dutch neighbourhoods, the social management of these districts came to be seen as more difficult by housing associations because of problematic or lacking integration of mainly ethnic minority groups, calling for additional social management tools. It was through the tool of 'social mix', central to the urban restructuring policy launched in 1997, that housing associations were provided with an instrument to re-balance the social composition of deprived neighbourhoods. Interventions in the housing stock facilitated the dispersal of poor and ethnic minority households, reducing housing associations' 'burden' of social management in deprived neighbourhoods (Uitermark 2003).

Over the last decades, the retrenchment of the Dutch welfare state has experienced another twist. Budgetary cutbacks were introduced through legal reforms (including the Social Support Acts of 2007 and 2015), affecting policy fields such as social care, youth and unemployment (Dijkhoff 2014). The Housing Act too was revised in 2015, maintaining that housing associations have to shift back to their core business, i.e. providing affordable housing only to low-income tenants. Consequently, housing associations have less freedom to develop non-landlord activities (Hoekstra 2017).

Assuming that the welfare state has become too expensive to maintain, the Dutch government is increasingly supporting citizens' self-organisation to address wider societal issues, steering towards a 'Participation Society' (see Kleinhans 2017). For example, citizens are encouraged to volunteer in their neighbourhoods and communities by providing informal care and support with daily activities to other people in need (e.g. refugees, social care clients, homeless etc.). Since 2015, a process of de-institutionalization has followed the closure of many social care institutions in the Netherlands, taking out a large number of homeless people and other welfare dependents (e.g. people with mental disorders). Most of them were accommodated in the social rented sector. In the same period, additional pressures onto housing associations concerned their obligation to house a large inflow of refugees mainly from the Middle-East and African countries.

These changes resulted in new challenges for housing associations, not only in relation to the provision of more dwellings for vulnerable social groups, but also in terms of integration processes of these groups in society and for the social management of urban neighbourhoods and communities. In this light, certain housing associations have

been developing new small scales initiatives, commonly known as Magic Mix (Van der Velden et al. 2016), to provide social housing for ‘vulnerable’ social groups (e.g. status holders, people with mental disorders or less invalidating problems, homeless people) and other ‘resourceful’ groups, mainly young households or students who also need affordable housing. The principle of social mix underlies many Magic Mix projects, whereby ‘vulnerable’ and ‘resourceful’ groups are brought to live next to each other with the idea that the latter will have a positive influence, in terms of facilitating social inclusion and self-reliance, on the former through collective involvement in community building activities (Costarelli et al. 2019).

Several Magic Mix projects, such as the Startblok Riekerhaven in Amsterdam, consists of a mix between young Dutch and young status-holders who manage the project by themselves (i.e. self-management). The assumption is that being involved in the self-management would help people of similar age group and household type to create social connections that facilitate the integration of status-holders (vulnerable group) into Dutch society (Czischke and Huisman 2018).

The share of social rented housing in Amsterdam (around 50%) is higher than the national average (around 30%), whilst showing signs of residualisation (Musterd 2014). The city of Amsterdam is very attractive for a variety of specific household types, especially students, young and higher educated households (Savini et al. 2016), which contribute to increase the demand for housing. However, since the private rental market is usually unaffordable for many of these young households, and social housing is increasingly inaccessible due to waiting lists that could take waiting time up to 10 years, finding an affordable place to live in Amsterdam is increasingly difficult for many youngsters.

4 Methodology

Housing Sociale in Italy and Magic Mix in the Netherlands could be considered as concrete manifestations of changing social housing contexts. Addressing the lack of affordable housing is one of the goals of both initiatives. Such lack can be considered as a consequence of structural scarcity of social housing supply (Italy), or connected to contingent issues such as governments’ reforms and external pressures, e.g. ‘refugee crisis’ (The Netherlands). It is in the context of specific initiatives launched to address the lack of affordable housing, i.e. Housing Sociale and Magic Mix, that innovative management strategies have emerged. Given the recent rise and innovation of these management strategies, and in line with the explorative scope of our research questions, we deliberately chose to adopt a qualitative, case study-oriented approach.

Our hypothesis is that different overarching configurations of social housing provision and welfare policy will determine different approaches to social housing management and we are interested to explore how. Drawing on Przeworski and Teune (1970 cited in Pickvance 2001), we adopted a combination between ‘most different’ and ‘most similar’ systems approaches. At country-level, we selected Italy and the Netherlands as they represent dissimilar combination of welfare regimes (Mediterranean versus conservative/socio-democratic) and housing systems (dualist versus unitary rental markets). At city-level, we focused on Milan and Amsterdam as both cities are attractive for a large number of young people, including students and highly skilled workers (Pareja-Eastaway et al. 2011) who struggle to find or access affordable housing solutions.

A desk research provided us with an overview on existing Housing Sociale and Magic Mix projects in the two cities. To select our case studies, we focused on projects targeting a mixed audience that included young people and encompassing innovative management strategies, i.e. the Integrated Social Management (Milan) and self-management (Amsterdam). The chosen case study initiatives are Startblok Riekerhaven in Amsterdam and ViVi Voltri in Milan, as described in Sect. 4.1. Although they present several differences, these are not in opposition with our research goals.

Throughout 2017, we conducted twenty-one semi-structured interviews as part of a larger research project. Fourteen interviews, conducted in English, were collected in the Netherlands, whilst seven interviews, conducted in Italian and translated in English, were collected in Italy. Through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies, we reached respondents who could provide us with in-depth information on the case study projects. These included professionals (i.e. housing associations' project managers, housing cooperative's staff) tenants and members of the management teams, civil servants of City Councils, policy advisors, and researchers. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti. Two coding procedures were followed. First, we inductively carved out contents related to case studies' features, specifically those referring to housing management strategies (i.e. structure and organisation, types of activities and aims of management). Second, we deductively focused on the degree of tenants involvement in housing management activities and on the type of relationship that exists between residents and housing providers. As the literature highlighted (see Sect. 3), hybrid non-profit housing providers are keener to involve residents in housing management activities in the forms of collaborative models which eventually reshape the roles of residents and professionals, as both are involved in the co-production of housing-related services.

In addition to interviews, and with similar rationale, we analysed relevant documents (websites, leaflets, and online newsletters) and notes from field observations (public presentation of the project Startblok in Amsterdam, held on 19th April 2017). The next section provides a description of case studies.

4.1 Description of case studies

4.1.1 Startblok Riekerhaven

Startblok Riekerhaven (Fig. 1) consists of 565 removable, pre-fabricated housing units distributed in 9 buildings (two- or three-storeys). Located in the neighbourhood Amsterdam Nieuw-West, Startblok was launched in July 2016 by housing association De Key (owner of the units), in partnership with social enterprise Socius Wonen and Municipality of Amsterdam.

Startblok Riekerhaven provides social rented housing for young people, half of them Dutch and half status-holders (mainly Syrian and Eritrean), between 18 and 27 years, for maximum 5 years. In each hallway, Dutch and status-holders are mixed door-by-door. Dutch tenants are eligible for this project upon complying with both objective, i.e. income below the threshold for social housing, age, and nationality, and subjective requirements, i.e. motivation to contribute the community building. Applicants' motivation is evaluated through information meetings and face-to-face interviews. Different requirements apply for status-holders, who are selected by the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and Municipality of Amsterdam.

Fig. 1 Startblok Riekerhaven

The goal of Startblok is to build a mixed community of tenants, Dutch and status-holders, who manage the project by themselves (i.e. self-management). Self-management is seen as a means to facilitate the social integration of status-holders in Dutch society.

4.1.2 ViVi Voltri

ViVi Voltri (Fig. 2) is a tenure mixed housing development launched in November 2016 and located in Barona, a peripheral neighbourhood in Milan. Promoted by the fund Fondo Residenze Social Housing, which is managed by the company Torre SGR, the housing development encompasses 319 dwellings for both sale and rent.

There are 113 rental dwellings (14 studios, 59 two-room apartments and 40 three-room apartments), allocated for maximum 8 years, and distributed in two adjacent buildings. One building consists of 57 dwellings allocated at social rent (*canone sociale*) to low-income households (with annual income between 7000 and 16,000 €), who have subscribed to the municipal public housing lists in Milan and in two neighbouring municipalities (Cesano Boscone and Corsico). The beneficiaries of these rental dwellings were mainly large-sized

Fig. 2 ViVi Voltri

households from North African countries. In another building, 56 dwellings were rented to low-middle income households (with annual income between 16,000 and 40,000 €) either single-parent or young, i.e. with at least one member below 35 years old, at a price in-between social and market rent (*canone moderato*). The housing development includes a playground area and two communal spaces on the ground floor of each building. One of them is available for activities and events organised by the residents of ViVi Voltri, whilst the other one, which has been assigned to external associations, provides facilities for neighbourhood residents.

Being appointed as Social Manager (*Gestore Sociale*), the housing cooperative DAR=Casa is responsible for the Integrated Social Management of rented dwellings. In the next sections, we will explain in more detail the two management models.

5 Findings

Integrated Social Management and self-management are two management strategies that characterise recent Housing Sociale and Magic Mix initiatives, respectively in Italy and the Netherlands, which aim to address the scarcity of affordable housing in the two contexts. In the next sections, we describe in detail the structure of each management strategy, highlighting the roles of involved players, the activities they are responsible for, as well as the specific aims. Section 5.2 discusses the different premises underlying tenants' participation in the two case study projects, while Sect. 5.3 explains the implications of such premises on the relationships between tenants and housing providers. As schematically represented in Fig. 3, it is argued that in both cases management strategies are aimed to increase tenants' responsabilisation but with different focus. Dutch tenants are nudged to take a more active role in facilitating the social integration of the most vulnerable tenants in the housing project, envisaging a focus of responsibility towards the community. In Italy, tenants' responsabilisation is mainly framed as boosting individuals' self-agency in relation to the

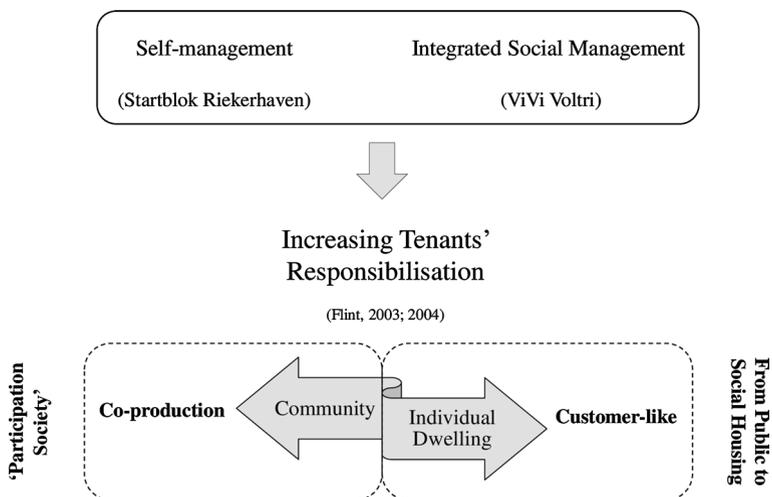


Fig. 3 Aims and scope of housing management strategies

maintenance of properties, stressing a focus of responsabilisation towards the individual dwelling (see Flint 2003, 2004).

Examined management strategies also differ in terms of degree of tenants involvement in housing management. Tenant participation plays a greater role in Startblok Riekerhaven than in ViVi Voltri, which in turn reflects distinct types of relationship between tenants and providers: a co-production (Dutch case) versus a customer-like (Italian case), as will be shown in Sects. 5.2 and 5.3.

Different focus of responsabilisation, different levels of tenants involvement, and distinct types of relationships between tenants and providers are embedded in broader transformations in housing and welfare policies in the two research contexts. As discussed in Sects. 3.1 and 3.2, these transformations are linked to the promotion of ‘Participation Society’ in the Netherlands, and to the transition from public housing (*Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica*) to privately-driven social housing supply (*Housing Sociale*) in Italy.

5.1 Housing management strategies

5.1.1 Self-management

Self-management in Startblok Riekerhaven has two main components:

1. Social management: involving community building (e.g. social activities) and practical duties (e.g. hygiene and safety). It is performed by five social managers, two group managers per hallway (one Dutch and one status-holder), and the grounds team (five members);
2. General management: involving administration, communication, and maintenance. It is performed by one administration manager, two PR, communication and social implementation managers, one maintenance manager, and the handyman team (five members).

Social managers, administration manager, PR, communication and social implementation managers, and maintenance manager are part-time employed tenants who form the self-management team. Group managers, grounds and handyman teams are composed of tenants who volunteer in return for a discount on the rent.

Self-management team is responsible for the selection of new tenants and for appointing new job positions in the self-management team, which are available for tenants only. Members of the self-management team are offered cultural diversity and psychological trainings as part of their preparation for this job. An external organization, Socius Wonen, supervises and coordinates the self-management. As part of the accountability process, tenants and professionals organise meetings in which they exchange feedbacks and report on performed tasks and activities, turnover rates, behaviours etc.

Self-management was set up as a strategy to ensure greater control over daily social dynamics and processes within a mixed community formed by young Dutch and status-holders. From a housing professional viewpoint, in fact, introducing self-management allowed coping with a specific situation that was perceived as requiring additional social management tools compared to traditional instruments, such as social mix (see Uitermark 2003). Following a massive inflow of refugees to the Netherlands in September 2015, the ‘tool’ of social mix was perceived as inadequate to address housing managers’ concerns about safety and liveability. As one respondent commented:

Interviewee: normally, we have one servant who is the manager of a group of 500 or 600 houses, to see if everything is efficiently clean and safe. And here we said: 'well, that's not enough in this case', so we came up with the idea to let people who live there manage their own community.

Interviewer: what were your concerns about?

Interviewed: I thought we might have more 'ice'...I was a little bit scared about safety. How does it work with all those guys from Syria and all those young people from Netherlands? We want youngsters coming in because of our mission, then we said: 'if we mix them together, well, this does work and we make [it] more controllable'. So, let's them manage it by themselves and they will form kind of new networks. (Project manager De Key, April 2017)

Forming new networks between Dutch tenants and status-holders was perceived as a necessary condition to prevent potential conflicts and to oversee a situation that was perceived as 'out of professionals reach'. As argued: "if you don't know each other, it doesn't form network, and if anything is happening it's the other group making a mistake. I don't think that would be a nice situation" (Project manager De Key, April 2017).

The inflow of status-holders into social housing resulted in increasing pressure onto housing managers to adopt a more social welfare-oriented approach, which consisted in providing them with opportunities and instruments for faster social integration paths (e.g. learning Dutch language and culture). According to one respondent: "we have to build [houses] but we also have [to build] a social infrastructure" (Project manager De Key, April 2017). Self-management was introduced by the housing association as a specific social infrastructure to deliver social welfare. The tenants are directly involved in, and made responsible for, managing such social infrastructure.

The rise of self-management as social infrastructure occurs in the context of broader reforms to social housing and welfare state, respectively the Housing Act and the Social Support Act issued in 2015, which resulted in two trends: (i) a growing inflow of vulnerable groups, i.e. social care patients, into the social rented sector, and (ii) less freedom for housing associations to develop non-landlord activities, e.g. community development, which used to address tenants' need of social welfare (Czischke 2009). Being less reliant on housing and urban policy tools to improve the social management of deprived neighbourhoods as it was in the late 1990s (see Uitermark 2003), the case of Startblok shows how certain housing associations are turning tenants more responsible for the social management of the community where they live.

Self-management entails a normative element which consists in requiring Dutch tenants to get actively involved in forming networks and delivering housing-related services together with status-holders, as part of their duties as members of the project. Housing associations maintain a 'gatekeeper' role since they can select the 'resourceful' Dutch tenants who are deemed as suitable and 'motivated' to contribute delivering social welfare. The next paragraphs will explain the Integrated Social Management model implemented in the Italian case study.

5.1.2 Integrated Social Management

In ViVi Voltri, the Integrated Social Management (*Gestione Sociale Integrata* in Italian) is performed by a non-profit housing cooperative, DAR=CASA, on behalf of the fund which owns the dwellings. The project is financed in such a way that annual returns on

investments are expected (see Sect. 3.1). Integrated Social Management consists of three main components:

- 1 Facility management: encompassing technical maintenance of dwellings, relationships with external providers and owner;
- 2 Property management: including administrative tasks like purchases, accounting, contracts stipulation;
- 3 Social management: involving individual counselling and support for tenants, relationships with tenants, management of arrears and communal spaces.

One staff member of the housing cooperative DAR=CASA is responsible for each component (totally three managers). Central to all components is a specific ‘care for the dweller’, which means that all housing managers are committed to build and establish trust relationships with tenants.

The ‘care for the dweller’ is considered as the main aim of Integrated Social Management, suggesting an explicit orientation of this management strategy towards a social welfare approach, rather than a business-like ethos (see Sect. 2). However, a closer look at the rationale underlying housing managers’ activities unravels a complex relationship between sociability (i.e. social welfare) and profitability (i.e. business-like) goals, which underpin the housing supply of Housing Sociale (see Sect. 3.1). While a main assumption of Integrated Social Management is to take care of inhabitants (*social welfare*), this is functional to achieve better management outcomes (*business-like*). Indeed, the most important ‘caring’ activities of Social Management can all be considered as preventive measures to secure regular payment of rents and guarantee an efficient and sustainable management of individual dwellings. As our respondents suggested, these activities include trainings in financial budget, stimulating households’ activation to solve problematic situations (e.g. financial deficit or loss of job), face-to-face visits to advise tenants on technical and/or behavioural issues related to the maintenance of dwellings, and individual counselling. As the following quote will show, activities such as individual counselling allows social managers to be aware of households’ economic and life situations in order to prevent undesirable situations, e.g. potential rent arrears, that could undermine the long-term financial sustainability of the project.

If, in a given moment, they [tenants] are in trouble with rent payment, they can notify us. If this is due to job loss or other reasons, we seek to direct them towards services or facilities to meet their needs and we try to understand how we can support them.

(...) Our objective is to provide affordable housing for families at sustainable prices, thus our ultimate goal is that households are able to stay in their house as long as they wish and that they live happily in these dwellings. So all social management activities aim at this ultimate goal. For example, the management of arrears is also aimed to the financial sustainability of the cooperative as this depends on tenants’ rents. But it is clear that if the aim of the cooperative is to provide housing, in reality the aim of the management is that our tenants are able to afford their dwellings. (DAR=CASA staff member, November 2017)

The Integrated Social Management promotes a style of management in which the social welfare approach, i.e. providing care and assistance to vulnerable households (in this sense sociability) is functional to ensure long-term economic efficiency and profitability of investments (business-like orientation). The overall aim of Integrated Social Management,

which coincides with its underlying normative aspect, is to make tenants more responsible for the maintenance of the dwellings they live in.

The latest developments in the Italian social housing system, i.e. the shift from publicly-supplied to privately-driven offer, suggest an alignment with other EU cases in far as an underlying reason for housing providers to engage in non-landlord activities, including those aimed to promote social welfare, is to ensure the sustainability of the company's core mission in terms of tenants' solvency and better management of the estates (see Czischke 2009). As a further confirmation of the relevance of business-oriented aspects within this type of management approach, social welfare-oriented aims such as stimulating participation and social cohesion amongst tenants are considered as secondary. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Self-management and Integrated Social Management aim to increase tenant responsibility but with different focus: towards the community (Dutch case) and towards the individual dwelling (Italian case) (see Flint 2003, 2004). In each strategy, the extent to which housing providers and managers commit themselves to involve residents in housing-related activities is different. The next section will explore in depth the different premises of tenants' participation in the two projects.

5.2 Tenants involvement in housing management activities

Allowing residents to be actively involved in the self-management of housing-related services makes participation a central premise of the Startblok project. Tenants are nudged to become more responsible for their living environment through greater participation in daily management activities either as workers, e.g. in the self-management team, or as volunteers, e.g. in the grounds team. Within the project, different degrees of tenants involvement are possible. The highest levels of participation involve tenants who are assigned specific roles in the self-management team, while the lowest levels of participation involve tenants who decide to join activities as attendees.

Dutch tenants join Startblok by virtue of their motivation to become active residents who will get involved in social activities helping status-holders to integrate in Dutch society. In one respondent's words, tenants must be motivated:

to live here with refugees and [must have] the attitudes to help people from other countries (...). [These] people are willing to be part of a community to build up here. (...) [It] is a free choice to come here and to live with people from other countries, and it's not because they [Dutch youngsters] can find a house and then OK, you'll get a place here. (Project manager De Key, April 2017)

Self-management can be considered as a manifestation of the Dutch dominant ideal of 'Participation Society' reflecting how citizens, in this case tenants, are stimulated and supported to do things for their communities on their own (see Kleinhans 2017). In this sense, the Amsterdam case provides an example of "how certain housing management techniques may be closely related to the wider policy promotion of active citizens" (Flint 2004, p. 899) to the extent that specific activities and related responsibilities, once primarily performed by institutional actors (housing associations), have now been assigned to citizens (tenants) themselves. As matter of fact, the self-management does not represent an 'exit strategy' deployed by tenants themselves, rather it represents a top-down, organisation-led strategy aimed to turn tenants into 'agents for social change' (see Czischke 2009) beside housing associations, uncovering a dual identity of social housing tenants "as active,

entrepreneurial consumers [tenants] and also responsible, duty-owing members of communities [citizens]" (Flint 2003, p. 625).

On the contrary, participation is not set as a pre-condition of the ViVi Voltri project, rather as a possible (of course) desirable outcome for the future. Professionals act as 'enabler' of tenants' participation by providing them with opportunities to develop their own activities (e.g. childcare) and to manage communal spaces (i.e. opening, closure, cleaning, scheduling of activities) by themselves. As such, communal spaces are considered as 'spaces of activation'. One respondent argued:

We seek to promote social cohesion, to make inhabitants know each other, to establish trust relationships and then we look at the outcomes. This does not mean that we assume that this space will be managed by tenants themselves. We do not know, maybe yes or no. That is a possible outcome that will also depend on who will come to live here. The communal space is mainly used by lower-income tenants as they have many children. These tenants did not come to live here because of a 'special' motivation but because of an urgent housing need. (DAR=CASA staff member, November 2017)

Although attempts to promote greater activation are present, these are less explicit and, to certain extent less 'binding', than in the Dutch project. As the previous quote highlighted, in Italy the reasons for tenants to join, or engage in, collective activities, such as those promoted within communal spaces, might not be necessary linked to a specific motivation, as it is for Dutch tenants, but connected to social welfare needs (e.g. childcare). The different premises of tenants' participation in the two case studies are indicative of distinct relationships between tenants and housing professionals, as will be shown in the next section.

5.3 Relationships between professionals and tenants

By envisaging residents as both producers and consumers of housing services, the case of Startblok Riekerhaven is close to a co-production logic, whereby residents-users are fully involved in the co-organisation and co-provision of several housing services that were typically arranged by housing managers. These services include rent administration, communication, cleaning of common spaces, small maintenance and technical interventions, inspection and supervision of dwellings, and selection of new tenants.

Several responsibilities for management activities moved from the housing provider to the tenants, either volunteering or working. In the latter case, this shift took the form of professionalization. Tenants were given the opportunity to take up management-related tasks and decisions concerning Startblok as a job, and they are paid for it. In this light, we can narrow the category 'residents-users' (see Sect. 3) down to a new subcategory that we call 'residents-workers', which implies a blurrier distinction between professionals and tenants' roles. Residents-workers seem to appreciate the commitments deriving from their obligations, attaching this new role with different meanings. For example, one argued: "yes, they give us responsibility but it's pretty good because we know what we need in the project and they don't live here and thus don't see" (Tenant-Worker, Startblok, September 2017). For others, working in, and for, Startblok helps to develop a sense of attachment which fosters their motivation and the overall job quality.

It's our job but I think because we do it here and we live here, we also want to make it nice and (...) you want us to grow and develop. It's like a job but I think if you are starting in the management team you are of course also more integrated in the

project. (...) I think it's what I really like of it. I did communication also in another job so I like it in general but doing it here makes it even more interesting. (Tenant-Worker, Startblok, September 2017)

Other respondents emphasised the opportunity to:

see the effects of the things you pose because your target group is also the group you are among (...). I think it's very different if you are an external team or person [who] comes here and [says]: 'OK Startblok, we will do this...yes but you don't live here, how do you know what's going on?' (...) We [tenants] have language and cultural differences and because they [status-holders] also work in the team, we are closer to each other than [someone] from [an] external [organisation]. (Tenant-Worker, Startblok, September 2017)

Differently from the Startblok, in ViVi Voltri the distinction between professionals and tenants' roles is remarkable. Professionals do not expect tenants to get involved in the co-production of housing services, since all management tasks are responsibility of the cooperative staff members (see Sect. 5.1.2). The company owning the dwellings, i.e. housing provider, 'externalised' the responsibility for housing management by involving another organisation, in this case a non-profit housing cooperative, as Social Manager. Consequently, tenants establish a 'direct' relationship with managers, rather than providers. As discussed in Sect. 5.1.2, the trust-based relationship between managers and tenants is important to guarantee a long-term financial sustainability of the whole project, which involves activities to foster tenants' responsibilities in relation to the appropriate maintenance of individual dwellings, including regular payment of rent. The Integrated Social Management could be framed as a specific tool for increasing "individual agency and accountability in relation to housing allocation, rent payments and maintenance of properties" (Flint 2004, p. 907). Since the accent of housing management is primary on residents' capacity to afford their houses and maintain them in proper conditions, social housing tenants are envisaged as autonomous and responsible 'customers' (see Flint 2003), highlighting a 'customer-like' relationship between tenants and housing provider (i.e. owner of the dwellings).

Compared to the Dutch case, where co-production in housing management is structured on an individual-level, i.e. from professionals to tenants, Integrated Social Management in Italy is mainly structured on an organizational-level, whereby multiple, profit and non-profit, private organisations make arrangements to achieve common goals and/or to solve problems that cannot be solved easily by single organizations (see Czischke 2018). The next section discusses our findings and provides several concluding remarks.

6 Discussion and conclusion

This paper explored innovative housing management strategies, i.e. self-management and Integrated Social Management, which have emerged in the context of recent social housing projects, respectively Startblok Riekerhaven in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and ViVi Voltri in Milan (Italy). Both projects aimed to provide affordable housing for vulnerable social groups, such as status-holders, low income and young locals. Three research questions have guided this work: how are innovative approaches to social housing management, i.e. Integrated Social Management and self-management, emerging in the context of current transformations in social rented sectors in Italy and the Netherlands? How do

such approaches unfold in the two contexts and what are the implications for residents and professionals and their relationships? Through an explorative, case-oriented approach, we unfolded the two management styles from a comparative perspective, which allowed grasping a deeper understanding on both similarities and differences.

Each housing management strategy has been described along its main characteristics, including aims, staff roles, and accountability arrangements coupled with a closer look at the premises of tenants' participation in housing management activities and how the latter reflect specific relationships between housing providers and tenants. This paper showed how examined approaches to social housing management are closely linked to transformations in social housing policy, i.e. the latest revisions to the Dutch Housing Act and the National Housing Plan in Italy, changing demand (e.g. status-holders) and provision of social housing (e.g. new financing systems such as the Integrated System of Funds), as well as governments' reforms and re-orientation of welfare state (e.g. the Dutch Social Support Act and the 'Participation Society').

Building on a wide, and mainly UK-based, literature (Damer 2000; Flint 2003, 2004, 2006; Flint and Kearns 2006; Franklin and Clapham 1997; Haworth and Manzi 1999; Manzi 2010; Walker 2000) on social housing management and tenant responsabilisation, this paper contributed to expand such knowledge by providing new evidence from different national and local social housing contexts, i.e. the Netherlands and Amsterdam, Italy and Milan. In both contexts, emerging housing management strategies aim to increase tenants' responsabilisation but with different focus and normative premises. Self-management in Startblok Riekerhaven (Amsterdam) provides a 'social infrastructure' aimed to enhance the process of social integration of the most vulnerable tenants in the housing project, i.e. status-holders. The normative construction of self-management involves the presence of 'role models', i.e. Dutch tenants, who provide the means to a faster and more effective integration path, possibilities to join social networks, and to learn the Dutch language and culture. Self-management entails a normative component also in the sense that it 'exhorts' tenants to participate and take an active role in management activities that were previously a main concern of housing professionals. In this sense, the focus of increasing tenants' responsabilisation goes beyond the 'private' dimension of individual dwellings, to include tenants' duties towards the *community* (Flint 2003). The shift of responsibilities for housing management from professionals to tenants shapes a co-production relationship between them, which also implies a blurrier distinction between their respective roles.

Integrated Social Management emerged in the context of Housing Sociale, which is a specific type of privately-driven social housing supply, combining sociability and care for the dweller with profitability aims, i.e. annual returns on investments (see Sect. 3.1). Performed by staff members of a non-profit housing cooperative, Integrated Social Management in ViVi Voltri encompasses a number of social welfare-oriented activities and individual counselling as part of the 'sociability' aims. A closer look at the rationale lying under these activities showed how these are ultimately functional to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the housing project, including efficient maintenance of properties and maximising tenants' capacity to afford their rents as long as they can. In this regard, also the mix of dwellings (social and quasi-market rent), which are allocated to tenants with different socio-economic conditions, is functional to ensure financial sustainability. The ultimate aim of Integrated Social Management is to enhance tenants' responsibilities in relation to the maintenance of *individual dwellings* (see Flint 2004), envisaging a customer-like relationship between providers and tenants. As such, this management approach clearly entails a normative premise for tenants to comply with their duties as customers and behave accordingly, e.g. proper use of the dwellings and common spaces. Differently

from the Startblok, tenants' participation in ViVi Voltri is not a pre-condition of the project, which in principle excludes tenants from additional responsibilities in housing-related services.

Building on Czischke (2018), who examined recent changing relationships between housing providers and residents in the context of co-production in collaborative housing, our paper contributes by showing that housing management approaches inspired to co-production models (the Dutch case) are much more reliant on specific eligibility requirements, such as motivation and attitudes, than management strategies featured by customer-like relationships (the Italian case). As tenants' involvement in housing management represents a necessary element to implement co-production, providers need to rely on 'motivated' social housing tenants if this management style is to be successful. Motivation refers to tenants' willingness to commit to delivering and managing housing-related services as well as to take an active role in community building, for example by participating in social activities and events. While in both case studies professionals rely on eligibility criteria that can be defined 'objectively', such as age or income levels, in Startblok Riekerhaven co-production requires professionals to include 'subjective' requirements such as motivation. This intrinsically implies a distinction between 'desirable' and 'less desirable' applicants, depending on candidates' willingness to take up additional responsibilities. Based on our comparative reading of co-production and customer-like styles of social housing management, we conclude that promoting social housing opportunities which are based on co-production involves a social justice issue in the way that applicants with similar socio-economic conditions and needs will be entitled to different chances to access such opportunities. These chances are crucially determined by applicants' endowment of specific subjective characteristics and personality traits rather than the mere housing need.

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