

REVIEW

Christian Donner (2006): Housing Policies in Central Eastern Europe

Vienna: Christian Donner, 325 pp, ISBN 3 9500417 6 1 / ISBN 978 3 9500417 6 7

Christian Donner has produced a new encyclopaedia. In 2000 he published an encyclopaedia of nearly 600 pages on housing policies in the EU15. This time he has produced an encyclopaedia of over 300 pages on housing policies in central eastern Europe, covering five countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. The format is almost identical to the former book.

The first section of the book is an overview, based on the author's general ideas and knowledge of the countries covered. The second section is a detailed report, country by country. A third and final section contains the author's analysis of a few selected areas of specific importance.

The midsection makes up the largest part of the book, and it is also the most valuable contribution in the book. The five countries are described in a common format. A basic description of geography, demography and other institutional factors serve as an introduction. It is followed by a chapter on housing policy up to 1989, a chapter on housing policy in 1990-1995 (*should read: 1990-2005, CHD*), a chapter on the housing market and a final evaluating chapter. These four chapters are all structured very much in the same way. New construction, housing market conditions, finances and taxation policy are covered, to mention a few aspects.

The midsection is the most interesting part of the book. It contains an impressive number of hard data, which is not easy to acquire from other sources. There are several reasons for this. First, this kind of data is scattered over many sources. Second, the author has bridged the language gap by using informants from the explored countries. Third, the author has filled in gaps in the data sources by making his own calculations. All is done in a reliable, orderly way with ample notations of sources.

The rigid construction of the book makes it easier to compare a specific aspect across countries (and even into the EU15 covered in the author's previous book). The disadvantage is that the text gets repetitive. It is, for example, not easy to separate market and policy into two different sections.

The weakest parts are the first and third section. These are analytical sections. The first is an introduction and the other is a summary section. They are both characterized by a set of discussions by the author, which roughly follows the structure of the important midsection. The analysis in these sections would benefit from more footnotes, where the author substantiates his conclusions. Most of the text is, however, a well-developed summary of information, which is presented in the midsection of the book.

Who should read this book? I can easily recommend the book as an encyclopaedia of information about the housing situation in the five explored countries. Data presented is very hard to acquire, and the author makes a true contribution to all those in need of a reliable and comprehensive source of information. I can only wish that the author finds it worthwhile to update his information as years are passing by. In fact, the book ought to be co-ordinated with the 'Housing Statistics of the European Union' and seen as a valuable supplement.

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