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*The ENHR 2002 Vienna Conference:
A Survey of Current International Housing Research*

Annual ENHR conferences provide an excellent opportunity to survey the thematic scope of research papers submitted. Confronted on this occasion with a body of 312 papers (as contained in the Book of Abstracts) the question arises where the emphasis of housing research currently lies.

A first approximation might be obtained by identifying a single thematic sector to which the individual papers should be attributed. The three basic sectors would be "Population", "State" and "Market" complemented with intermediary areas of interchange between the three pairs of those original sectors, namely "Rights and duties", "Regulation and subsidies" and "Goods and services". A central core would be formed by "Habitat" where all three basic sectors overlap.

After assigning each paper to one of the aforementioned sectors/areas a fairly clear picture emerges: primary sectors (population, state, market) attract little housing research while state regulation and supply subsidies and the exchange of goods and services seem to be currently more popular with scholars. A full one-third of all papers would correspond to the "Habitat" core, however, as they involve all three basic sectors.

However, this approach seems too rough-and-ready and a more detailed evaluation might provide a more precise picture and also some geographical differentiation. Therefore, some 40 prominent keywords were identified and allotted to the former seven sectors/areas of research while the 60 countries being dealt with were distributed into ten groups of vaguely similar characteristics. (Of course, as cross-national papers refer to several countries the overall results are somewhat biased towards them.)

When thus comparing the curve of topic distribution for all countries with data for a particular geographical group certain deviations emerge:

- In Northern Europe (DK, FI, IS, NO, SE) concepts such as mobility, housing policy, market, lifestyle and sustainability appear more frequently than on average.
- Research in North-western Europe (IE, UK) currently focuses on social housing and also frequently treats topics such as: exposed groups, community, homelessness and neighbourhood.
- In Western Europe (BE, FR, NL) topics like social housing, management, mobility, renewal, neighbourhoods and segregation score above average.
- In the Germanic countries of Central Europe (AT, CH, DE) topics such as health, participation, renewal, cohesion and sustainability are relatively frequent.
- The few papers from Southern Europe (ES, IT, PT) concentrate on finance, housing provision and segregation.
- Research in numerous countries of former communist Eastern Europe (AL, BA, BL, CZ, EE, GE, HR, HU, LA, LT, PL, RO, RU, SI, SK, YU) focuses on housing policy in the wake of political transformation and also frequently deal with questions of renewal/regeneration of the existing housing stock.
- Papers on Middle Eastern countries (EG, IL, IR, LB, KW, TR) stress aspects of housing cultures, lifestyle, housing provision and poverty.
- South and East Asian (CN, HK, ID, IN, JP, KR, MY, NP, SG, TH, TW, VN) research concentrates on policy and markets issues.

- In North America and Australasia (AU, CA, NZ, US) currently ethnic topics and tenant subsidies play an important role in housing research.
- The few papers on African and Latin American countries (BR, CU, NG, ZA) concentrate mainly on questions of finance.

On the other hand, papers not linked to a particular country i.e. of a more theoretical character quite well correspond to the overall structure of topics with additional emphasis given to poverty and sustainability.

The resulting aggregate structure without regard to geography now offers a more balanced picture: except for the infrequently treated "Rights/duties" area, all sectors appear with a 10-20% share. This goes well with the complex character of housing research and the varied professional backgrounds of housing researchers.

In addition, comparing the shift of workshop structures over time and the number of papers presented in each one during the latest four major ENHR conferences (i.e. Helsingør, DK / 1996, Cardiff, UK / 1998, Gävle, SE / 2000 and Vienna, AT / 2002) one can distinguish some characteristic trends in housing research:

- The history of housing policy is a recent topic within ENHR research.
- Housing and housing policy theory remains a well-established research area.
- Housing (and real estate) economics and housing finance have both been prominent research areas and together represented almost one-third of all papers in Gävle.
- East European housing has appeared as an independent workshop at ENHR conferences since Gävle (perhaps sparked by the intermediary ENHR conference in Balatonfüred, HU / 1999).
- Migration / mobility and minority ethnic groups have maintained a steady pace throughout this period. The same is valid for housing and urban sustainability.
- Aspects of social exclusion, homelessness and poverty neighbourhoods were dealt with extensively during all four conferences.
- Lifestyle in housing has become an important research topic since Gävle.
- Urban renewal and renovation/rehabilitation of the older housing stock has declined in importance in housing research, at least according to the number of papers submitted.

Finally, on the basis of the above findings a personal suggestion may be permitted: in spite of its continuing resistance against any official inclusion of housing matters in its agenda, the European Commission should recognise the inextricable linkage between adequate housing consumption and social cohesion and hence assume a clearing-house role in this policy area by:

- Providing financial support for cross-national housing research,
- Periodically monitoring national/regional housing conditions based on comparable national data,
- Making internationally accessible important best-practice housing information and
- Periodically publishing an evaluation of housing policy, housing market and housing consumption developments in individual EU countries.

On the other hand, the ENHR should work towards recognition by the European Commission as a true "network of excellence" in housing matters.

(See also PowerPoint presentation)