

Political Science, Politics, and Housing Studies

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It has often been claimed that the academic field of housing studies is dominated by a *policy perspective*, i.e. an ambition to make relevant and useful contributions to political, administrative and professional decision-making. More seldom researchers in the field employ a *politics perspective*, analysing the political institutions of relevance to housing provision and the games and processes of decision-making per se.

This paper takes a politics perspective and reviews research on housing that focuses political institutions (state and non-state) and processes of interaction between political elite actors as well as between elite actors and citizens in general. It also discusses applications in housing studies of some normative political concepts like democracy, citizenship and social justice. The argument of the paper is related to three societal levels: national housing systems, local urban governance, and estate management and resident participation with a main emphasis on the national level. The review encompasses work by political scientists as well as by researchers from other disciplines.

The outline is as follows: In the next section the modest position of political science in the field of housing studies is verified, and some possible explanations to this deficit are discussed. This is followed by a short conceptual discussion on housing policy and housing politics leading up to the outline of a more elaborate political perspective on housing provision. On the basis of previous research it is claimed that the specific policy theory of housing provision prescribes central roles to markets and informal networks. The review of empirical research builds on this theoretical background and starts out with a section focusing research on the national level. This is followed by one section that highlights some research on more local levels and one introducing some normative approaches to housing provision. The concluding section evaluates the potential of various approaches and points out some promising lines of development. It is also briefly discussed how political science could contribute to housing research – and vice versa.

The policy orientation of housing studies and the modest role of political science

Political science is about policy and politics. The original ambition behind this paper was to review and assess political science research in the field of housing, and to make suggestions for future housing research within this academic discipline. Since housing research, according to many observers, is (too) policy-oriented (e.g. Kemeny 1992, Bengtsson & Kemeny 1995, Kemeny 1999, Allen 2005; cf. Allen & Gurney 1997), one might perhaps expect a rich body of political research on housing. However, somewhat paradoxically, the discipline of political science has a rather modest position in the field, both when it comes to empirical contributions and theoretical influence. Few researchers with a background in political science are active in the housing studies community, and the discipline has not left many traces in the scientific housing discourse.¹ When studies of housing policy, or indeed of politics, power and governance in housing, are carried out, this is mainly done by scholars from other disciplines, e.g. economics, geography and, in particular, sociology.

¹ The Scandinavian countries appear to represent a minor deviation from this general picture – even allowing for this author's observation post in Sweden. The single best known work on housing written by a political scientist is probably still Patrick Dunleavy's book on the political process behind mass housing and the boom of high-rise construction in Britain after the second world war (Dunleavy 1981). Dunleavy's research career may also illustrate political scientists' limited interest in housing studies; he has not returned to the field since.

The limited role of political science in the field has been verified quantitatively by a search of articles in the four leading European multidisciplinary housing journals *European Journal of Housing Policy*, *Housing Studies*, *Housing, Theory and Society* and *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*. Political science is far less visible in these journals than the disciplines of economics, geography and sociology (Bengtsson 2009b).

None of the more obvious explanations to this deficit seem to be valid. The central concepts of political science ('power', 'democracy', 'citizenship', 'social justice' etc.) are definitely of relevance to housing, and housing issues are still generally considered to be of political interest. A more plausible explanation is based on the historical traditions of political science – its macro orientation and its emphasis on analysing the state, while housing policy is mainly implemented on micro levels and through non-state institutions (cf. below). It is true that modern political science, with its interest in informal institutions, networks and governance, does not overlook such broad societal perspectives. However, academic inertia and path dependence may also be part of the explanation, affecting negatively the status within the political science community of micro-level and non-statist studies. More importantly, and perhaps related to this, the economic incentives and the institutional support for doing housing research seem to be weaker in political science than in other disciplines, again, somewhat paradoxically, due to the policy orientation in the field (Bengtsson 2009b).²

Due to these findings, the point of departure of this article is not the discipline of political science, but the subject of *housing politics*. The general concept of politics can be defined as something like:

Politics is the process by which groups of people make decisions. The term is generally applied to behaviour within civil governments, but politics has been observed in all human group interactions, including corporate, academic, and religious institutions. It consists of 'social relations involving authority or power' and refers to the regulation of a political unit, and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy. (Wikipedia 24/08/09.)

This definition indicates, though admittedly somewhat vaguely, what could be meant by 'housing politics' – in contrast to 'housing policy'. It focuses on process rather than outcome, on action, interaction and social relations rather than structure, on the formulation and application of policy rather than on its substantial contents. Moreover the definition features power and strategy (or 'tactics'), and, though it highlights state and government, it also includes non-state institutions. Most importantly it emphasises the games between political actors, and the institutional rules and outcomes of these games, rather than the substantial outcome of political decision-making. While *housing policy* is about housing-related decision-making, its substance and outcome, *housing politics* is about conflict and cooperation between actors with interests in housing provision and about the effects of such interaction in terms of policy, implementation, institutions, power and legitimacy.³

² Since political scientists are typically more interested in political actors, processes and institutions than in social and economic outcomes, their contributions may be less relevant to policy recommendations than those of economists, sociologists or geographers.

³ 'Housing policy' has been defined as 'any sustained course of action designed to affect housing conditions' (Donnison & Ungerson 1982, p. 13). The demarcation line between housing policy and housing politics is not clear-cut, and much empirical work actually includes both. The balance between the two perspectives in housing studies is illustrated by the fact that in the period 2000–2008 no less than 185 articles in the four journals mentioned above had the word 'policy' in their *titles*, whereas only 10 article titles included the word 'politics' (Bengtsson 2009b, p. 7). This balance – or imbalance – is another side of the modest role of political science in the field.

The paper reviews theoretical and empirical research on housing politics on the ‘macro’, ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ levels, corresponding to politics of national housing provision, local governance and planning, and direct housing supply respectively.⁴ Following the tradition of political science the emphasis is on the national level, though some interesting studies of housing politics on the meso and micro levels will also be discussed.

One obvious speciality of political science, tentatively the theoretical core of the discipline, can be summarised in the slogan ‘taking elite actors seriously’. The action and interaction of individual and collective elite actors and the effects on policy and institutions are often in focus and problematised in political science research, typically based on some implicit assumption of bounded (Simon 1957) or thin rationality (Elster 1983). Paraphrasing Mills (1959) about the ‘sociological imagination’, the open-ended analysis of political action and interaction, based on ideology, self-interest and social norms, may be where the *politological imagination* is at its best and can give its richest contributions.⁵

Such approaches often imply an interest in *middle-range theorizing* (Merton 1957) and in more or less rationalistic or intentional *social mechanisms* (Elster 1989, Hedström & Swedberg 1998; cf. Coleman 1990). In some of the classics of political science and political sociology perspectives like these have been fruitfully used to discuss, among other things, political and social dilemmas (Ostrom 1991), actor-based versions of ‘power over’ (Lukes 1974), political opportunity structures (Tilly 1978), path dependence (Collier & Collier 1991), welfare state development (Korpi 2001) and retrenchment (Pierson 1994).⁶

In political theory, concepts like power, democracy and citizenship are also typically related to actors and institutions, whereas sociologists tend to define them more in terms of structures and discourses. The normative discussion about democracy and citizenship is also more explicit in political science than in other disciplines.

A political perspective on housing provision

What distinguishes the politics of housing provision from the politics of other welfare state sectors – and from welfare state politics in general? The discussion about the *policy theory of housing provision* may well be the scientific discourse where political science as a discipline has made its most distinct contribution to our understanding of housing policy and politics.⁷

⁴ Other levels have been left out, mainly due to lack of space, e.g. the household level and the international and transnational levels. Problems on these levels could also be analysed in terms of housing politics (cf. for example Somerville 2000, chap. 2, and Smith 2002 respectively).

⁵ Of course political scientists neither have monopoly on nor precedence to this type of imagination – as will be clear from the empirical review below. Dunleavy’s case study of British mass housing politics (Dunleavy 1981) is a good empirical example of how *politological imagination* can be used to make theoretically relevant interpretations of housing politics and power. (If written today, Dunleavy’s case studies would no doubt have been related to modern political theories, e.g. about institutionalisation.)

⁶ See Somerville & Bengtsson 2002 and Bengtsson & Somerville 2002 for an outline of such a perspective of ‘contextualised rational action’ and a discussion of how it can be applied in studies of tenant participation, housing management and comparative housing policy. Perspectives based on thin rationality can also help us understand why policy-makers do not always consider ambitious evaluations, nor implement well thought-out policy proposals from housing researchers (cf. Scharpf 1997, pp. 10–12, Bengtsson 2009b).

⁷ ‘Policy theory’ can be defined as ‘the total of causal and other assumptions underlying a policy’ (Hoogerwerf 1980).

The relation between type of policy and type of politics was discussed in the 1970s by the political scientists Theodore J. Lowi and James Q. Wilson. Lowi (1972) makes the distinction between policies which are regulative, redistributive, distributive and constituent, depending on the applicability and the likelihood of coercion. He relates each type of policy (and each mode of state coercion) to a distinctive process of political activity and interaction. Criticising Lowi's model, Wilson (1974) suggests another typology based on the distribution of (1) the benefits and (2) the costs of a policy. Both benefits and costs may either be concentrated to a few members of society or distributed among many, which would give four types of policy with different impacts on coalition building and power relations within a policy sector.

Lowi's and Wilson's models are both based on the distributive patterns of different policies, in economic and regulatory terms. The state is seen as a redistributing mechanism, which collects taxes from citizens and allocates public goods. For reasons examined below, however, it is difficult to apply such distributive welfare models to housing provision.⁸ Instead the corresponding academic discourse on housing has focused on the mode of implementation and not the outcome.⁹ What makes housing policy special are the well-known economic and social specificities of housing markets: On the 'supply side' the longevity and physical sluggishness of the housing stock (Stahl 1985, Arnott 1987), and on the 'demand side' the social importance of dwelling and the 'attachment costs' (Dynarski 1986) associated with a household's transfer from one dwelling in one housing area to another.

As explicated by Bengtsson (2001), the socially and politically dominant policy theory of housing provision as welfare state policy defines housing as being at the same time an individual market commodity and a public good demanding state involvement. This makes analogies with other welfare sectors, where state allocation is the main distributive mechanism, misleading. Since housing should, as far as possible, be distributed in accordance with consumer preferences, the politically defined 'needs' cannot be fulfilled by direct state allocation.¹⁰ Instead voluntary market contracts between buyer and seller or between landlord and tenant serve as the main mechanism for distributing housing, while state intervention typically has the form of *correctives*, defining the economic and institutional setting of those market contracts.¹¹

Another Scandinavian political scientist who has discussed the specificity of housing policy and politics is Ulf Torgersen, who in a short seminal article describes housing as 'the wobbly pillar of the welfare state'. Other welfare sectors, e.g. pensions, schooling and health, have a number of common characteristics. Fairly clear standards have been extracted from the vague concept of need, standards that define when the institutions in charge are responsible to take action, and lack of conformity to those standards is subject to legal action from the prospective recipient. Those responsible for implementing the policies in other sectors are

⁸ Another problem is that the very classification of a policy in Lowi's or Wilson's terms is often part of what is politically contested (Fischer 2003, pp. 64–66).

⁹ Gustavsson (1980b) is an interesting exception. He boldly combines Lowi's and Wilson's models and makes an attempt to apply an integrated model to the political and academic debate on Swedish housing policy.

¹⁰ If housing is basically a private good, why is its provision seen as a matter of political concern at all? One answer is that the specificities of the housing market, if left alone, may result in strong fluctuations and in heavy imbalances in market power between suppliers and consumers (cf. Bengtsson 2001).

¹¹ Oxley & Smith 1996, pp. 2–3, make a similar observation about the role of the state in housing provision, though not related to a discussion on policy theory; cf. also Lund 2006, pp. 1–2. Lundqvist (1992, pp. 4–6) takes the policy theory of state correctives to the market as the implicit point of departure in his model of possible state interventions into the housing sector, which relates such interventions to either consumption (affecting household purchasing power) or production (affecting dwelling prices).

typically trained bodies of professionals, within a fairly unified institutional complex with well-defined borders, a certain esprit de corps, and a national director. Even though some of those elements may sometimes be discerned in housing provision as well, what is striking is the contrast in these respects between housing and other welfare sectors (Torgersen 1987, pp. 116–118).

These deviations in how housing policy is implemented are all expressions of the policy theory of market correctives. In such a policy theory the politically defined ‘needs’ of housing must include manifest or latent consumer preferences as an important ingredient, which means that a formal and bureaucratic mode of implementation would represent too strong an intrusion on consumer sovereignty.¹²

The specificities of housing provision as a policy field have theoretically important implications for *politics* on different levels.¹³ On the *macro level*, the policy theory of market correctives means that political decisions on tenure forms and other types of market regulations are crucial. Such decisions may concern market regulations constraining the bargaining room for seller and buyer, or economic support to certain types and forms of housing by means of subsidisation, financial security or tax relieves. The dominant policy theory says it is not for the state to decide how citizens should be housed, but it may be for the state to set up guarantees that citizens have a real opportunity to find decent housing in the market at a reasonable cost.

This is why *housing tenures* should be seen as the most important political institutions of housing provision as welfare state policy. Forms of tenure are vital to housing policy and implementation at all levels because they define the formal position of residents in their capacities as owners, co-owners and users of their dwellings, and thus set up the rules of the games between actors in the housing market. ‘Housing tenures are institutions, sets of practices and rules that regulate a particular field of human action and interaction’ (Ruonavaara 2005, p. 214).¹⁴ Thus tenure forms, defined widely and including how housing estate ownership is organised, are crucial both to housing policy and politics. Housing (tenure) policy on the macro level defines housing politics on lower levels – and, through institutionalisation, on the macro level as well.¹⁵

¹² Harloe, who refers to Torgersen, explains the difference by the fact that housing, unlike other spheres of provision for human needs, provides profitable opportunities for capitalism, and so ‘... anything more than a limited and partial decommodification is likely to provoke intense resistance’ (Harloe 1995, pp. 2–3). Of course, Bengtsson’s and Torgersen’s interpretations of the political and normative discourse do not rule out Harloe’s structural explanation.

¹³ Certainly each welfare state sector has its specific features, but in most cases they only represent variations within a general logic of state allocation, as outlined by Torgersen. The critical role played by the market, together with the specificities of this market, makes the policy theory of housing provision different in kind from this ideal-type model of welfare state provision.

¹⁴ See Ruonavaara 1992 for a discussion on types and forms of tenure. Scott suggests a useful and inclusive general definition of institution: ‘Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour’ (Scott 1995, p. 33).

¹⁵ Several authors have claimed that the concept of housing tenure has been used too widely and too abstractly in housing research (e.g. Ball, Harloe & Martens 1988, p. 30, Barlow & Duncan 1988, 1994). Hulse (2008, p. 217) suggests that ‘...the position of housing tenure as the key explanatory concept in housing research is at best inflated and at worst can obscure the relationships between households and housing’. Actually what these authors warn against seems to be a simplified analysis where e.g. owner occupation is tacitly taken to represent the same thing in different housing regimes. Always keeping in mind the important distinction suggested by Ruonavaara (1992) between (ideal) types and (specific) forms of tenure should actually take care of that problem. Regardless of this general debate, precisely in the analysis of housing politics and institutions the concepts of tenure and tenure policy are not only useful but absolutely crucial.

In the traditional ideal-type form of state allocation of public goods the *meso level* consists of state agencies in charge of the distribution, or responsible of organising, financing, recruiting and supervising the administrative activities on the micro level. Agencies on the meso level provide the link between political decisions and the ultimate provision to citizens, typically by interpreting, translating and implementing policies and evaluating results. Meso-level politics often has to do with games and institutions of steering, implementation and evaluation or with power relations and power games between different administrative levels, e.g. between central and local government.

In housing provision the meso level is more difficult to define since it consists not only, and not primarily, of public bodies.¹⁶ Rather it consists of several, formally independent though in practice interdependent, actors and institutions: local authorities, contractors, housing companies, non-government organisations etc. Furthermore, and again due to the specific policy theory of market correctives, the main political instrument on the meso level is not direct allocation to citizens, but physical, economic and social *planning*, aiming at securing, among other things, that citizens' housing needs are fulfilled in longer terms. In this context housing is only one element of urban politics – though undeniably an important one. As a consequence the meso level of housing provision is typically organised in planning networks where broader issues are negotiated than just taking care of housing needs.¹⁷

The *micro level*, finally, is where citizens ultimately receive the public good. Here political scientists often study the meeting between citizens and 'street-level bureaucrats' and professionals, be they teachers, police officers or social workers. In practice these civil servants often have considerable discretion in the delivery, so they are not only neutral implementers but also exercisers of political power (cf. Lipsky 1980). In housing provision in contrast this final delivery is normally not executed by state (or state-regulated) officials, but by market actors following a completely different logic of implementation. In owner-occupation this is typically a one-time transaction – though of long-lasting importance. In the rental sector the relation is more permanent, and the 'street-level bureaucrat' of housing policy is the public or private landlord. Here things are complicated by the landlord's potential market power over tenants due to Dynarski's attachment costs.¹⁸

Thus, the deviant policy theory of housing provision has important implications for the scientific analysis of housing politics on the macro, meso and micro levels. We now turn to some examples of such analysis.

Studies of national and comparative housing politics

The dominance of policy perspectives

There is a rich, almost abundant literature about *housing policy* on the national level, both comparative and single-country studies. Even though the policy theory of market correctives

¹⁶ To some extent Britain has been an exception with its large state-owned social rental sector; cf. below.

¹⁷ Recent trends of new public management and network governance in welfare state implementation have made other sectors more similar to housing in this respect. In housing network implementation is nothing new but an integrated aspect of the policy theory of state correctives to the market. Again Britain is an important exception here, which will be discussed below.

¹⁸ This is not to say that local bureaucrats have no power over citizens, actually their power position is precisely Lipsky's point. But administrative power and market power have different logics and should be analysed accordingly.

is seldom highlighted, tenure policy, in the wide meaning discussed above, regularly has a central position in the accounts and analyses – which corroborates Bengtsson’s and Torgersen’s theses about the distributive logic of housing provision.

One category of comparative studies contrast ‘housing systems’, ‘housing regimes’ or ‘structures of housing provision’.¹⁹ Other studies compare policies directed towards specific tenures: private renting (e.g. Harloe 1985, Danermark & Elander, eds, 1994), social rented housing (e.g. Clapham & English, eds, 1987, Emms 1990, Harloe 1995), and sometimes both rental sectors together (e.g. Kemeny 1995, Oxley & Smith 1996). There are also several comparative studies of home-ownership (e.g. Kemeny 1981, Kurz & Blossfeld 2004), at least one about cooperative housing (Andrusz 1999) and one about conversions from rental tenure to home-ownership (Lundqvist 1986). Most work in this genre has a focus on policy and only considers politics in brief, without theorising.²⁰

Numerous studies investigate the housing regime and housing policies of one single country, in the English language mainly on the UK, the US, and to some extent other English-speaking countries.²¹ There is also a large stock of evaluations of specific policy instruments (rent regulation, planning, mortgage systems, housing allowances etc.) or housing reforms, mainly those launched by British governments. The UK bias is not surprising and mirrors both the strong British housing studies community and the general dominance of the English language in social science publication. In particular the housing privatisation reforms initiated by the Thatcher governments in the 1980s have left deep traces in the international housing literature.²²

Both the comparative and the single-country studies are often descriptive in their nature. Typically they describe the historical development of housing, the main institutions in terms of tenure forms, systems of finance, land and estate regulation, the characteristics of the existing stock and the recent production. If power and politics are discussed it is often in a narrative mode rather than in universal terms. The perspective may be macro-sociological and related to social or discursive structures, or microeconomic and related to outcomes on the housing market in terms of efficiency or distribution. Sometimes these studies are, overtly or covertly, critical to current government policies, often on rather obscure normative grounds.

In a critical review of comparative housing research Kemeny & Lowe (1998) make a distinction between ‘juxtapositional’, ‘convergence thesis’ and ‘divergence thesis’ studies.²³

¹⁹ Among the best known in this genre are Donnison 1967 (and Donnison & Ungerson 1982), Headey 1978, Pugh 1980, McGuire 1981, Dickens et al. 1985, Ball, Harloe & Martens 1988, Boelhouwer & van der Heijden 1992, Lundqvist 1992, Power 1993, Barlow & Duncan 1994, McCrone & Stephens 1995, Balchin (ed.) 1996, Donner 2000 and Lawson 2006. There are also some comparative books on housing in eastern Europe, e.g. Turner, Hegedüs & Tosics (eds) 1992, Clapham et al. (eds) 1996 and Donner 2006.

²⁰ Some exceptions are discussed below.

²¹ On Britain see e.g. Cullingworth 1979, Dunleavy 1981, Clapham, Kemp & Smith 1990, Birchall (ed.) 1992, Balchin 1995, Malpass & Murie 1999, Somerville (ed.) 2005, Mullins & Murie 2006.

²² Cf. Kemeny (1992, chap. 2) for a critical discussion of ‘the Anglo-Saxon bias in comparative rental research’. US policies seem to be less prominent in studies of housing than in many other sectors, probably due to the strong market-orientation and the residual and privatised character of US housing (cf. Bratt, Stone & Hartman 2006, Doling 1997, pp. 17–19). Of course, numerous studies of housing policy and politics have been published in other languages than English. They have not been reviewed for this article – with the only exception of two Scandinavian projects which have not been fully published in English. Another delimitation of the paper is that studies of housing politics in the third world are not included.

²³ Convergence thesis studies’ see all countries as being subject to the same universalistic imperatives, be it the logic of capitalism, industrialism, privatisation, or something else. ‘Divergence thesis studies’ instead attempt to

Using their alternative terms ('particularistic', 'universalistic' and 'middle range' approaches) a similar categorisation can be applied to single-country studies as well. Undoubtedly, most studies of housing policy are of the particularistic type, i.e. detailed descriptions of a kind criticized already by Oxley (1991, p. 67). Kemeny and Lowe make the important point (pp.163–164) that there is actually an unexplicated theoretical perspective informing this type of analysis, one of central governments having important formative influence, almost a capacity to pick and choose between different housing systems. The other side of this implicit government omnipotence is, of course, that the institutional context is disregarded – and that actors other than government and political parties tend to be disregarded. This also makes such studies less interesting in terms of housing *politics*.

Case studies and comparative studies of housing policy are often based on some descriptively used theory used as a taxonomy or a conceptual framework to organise presentation and make comparison possible. Several studies have been based on Esping-Andersen's three models of welfare regimes: liberal, corporatist and social democratic (Esping-Andersen 1990; e.g. Balchin 1996 and, more ambitiously, Barlow & Duncan 1994 who also include 'rudimentary welfare states'; cf. also Hulse 2003, Hoekstra 2003, 2005 and Stamsø 2009).²⁴ Other, more housing-specific, theories are that have been used as basis for comparison are Ball's concept 'structure of housing provision' (Ball 1986, Ball, Harloe & Martens 1988, van der Heijden 2002; cf. Lundqvist 1992), and Kemeny's distinction between unitary and dualistic rental markets (Kemeny 1993, 1995, 2006, Balchin 1996 and van der Heijden 2002).²⁵

The importance of middle range theorising

The descriptive application of theory as taxonomies may indeed be a fruitful approach to interpreting and comparing *housing policy* – it is open for conclusions in terms of both convergence and divergence. In contrast, the scientific study of *housing politics*, in the meaning used in this paper, is typically middle range to its nature.

In the grand universalistic theories political actors and institutions at the most serve as ripples on the surface of the structural waves. We can learn a lot about political actors and institutions in particularistic texts on housing policy and housing systems, not least in the historical backgrounds.²⁶ However, what we get is often non-theoretical narratives about what policies specific governments, commissions, parties and political leaders have supported. And the institutions described (not seldom in detail) are often rather myopically presented in terms of formal organisation, official functions etc. and without the theoretical relief necessary to draw any general conclusions.

In contrast, the challenge to academic students of housing politics is to analyse political actors, institutions and discourses in general terms by replacing their specific 'proper names' and specific characteristics with theoretical concepts and perspectives that allow some form of

discern patterns and typologies of housing systems, and to develop theories of the middle range drawing on wider social sciences to generate contextualised explanations (Kemeny & Lowe 1998).

²⁴ As pointed out by Kemeny (2001a), many applications of Esping-Andersen's welfare regime model, both on the macro level and specifically on the housing sector, use it only as a typology, without considering the underlying social theory about power structures and class-based constellations.

²⁵ Kemeny's model is presented below. Different variants of Titmuss' (1968) distinction between residual and institutional welfare state arrangements have also been applied to housing (e.g. Heidenheimer, Hecló & Adams 1975, Donnison & Ungerson 1982).

²⁶ Somerville (1994) even labels some of the particularistic studies 'explanations in terms of systems of actors' – adding that this type of explanation is more often implied than discussed.

generalisation beyond the empirical cases studied. In the tradition of middle range theorising the aim should be to identify and analyse logics, patterns and mechanisms in one empirical context that may also be recognisable in other similar contexts. This would make it possible to combine open-endedness with an ambition to generalise beyond the individual case without assuming actors to be neither ‘cultural dopes’ (Garfinkel), nor utility-maximising ‘rational dopes’.²⁷

Studies of housing politics and policy

Headey (1978) is an early work that relates differences in housing policy to politics and ideology in a comparison between Sweden, Britain and the US. Headey tries to go beyond particularism by introducing a conceptual framework based on the incentives of housing sector actors and the ‘political and operational feasibility’ of sequences of policy development. This is definitely an example of middle-range theorising on housing politics. Still the empirical analysis is rather voluntaristic and, as Marcuse (1982) points out, the application of the framework does not add much to the historical account but rather makes it more superficial.

Gustavsson (1980a) investigates the coalitions and conflicts leading up to the formative political decisions on Swedish housing policy in 1974. Though his empirical evidence on the actor level is thin to say the least, his analysis can still serve as an example of how this type of rationalistic reconstruction of policy alternatives, preferences and strategies on elite level should be carried out.

Another Swedish political scientist, Lundqvist (1992), carries out along similar lines an empirically more ambitious exploration of elite politics and housing policy in a comparison of housing and privatisation in four European countries. He applies a perspective of policy networks and power resources in an analysis of the positions and actions taken by political parties in relation to welfare state retrenchment in the housing sector. Backed by empirical data this frame of reference proves to give a plausible interpretation of the course of events and outcomes in the cases studied, in particular the continued economic support to mortgaged owner occupation in a period of general cutbacks.

Studies of housing politics and institutions

These three studies mainly explore the impact of politics on *policy*. Other investigations that focus on the relation between politics and *institutions*.²⁸ The early and exemplary comparison between housing provision in Britain and Sweden by Dickens et al. (1985) is actually a two-level analysis on the national as well as – in the case of Britain – the local level.²⁹ Differences in the relation between capital, labour and land ownership is seen as crucial to understanding the variability over time and between the two countries, whereas local differences are found to be the result of varying economic and political strategies within these general institutional conditions (Dickens et al., 1985, pp. 242–244). Regardless of this ‘open-ended Marxian’ framing, the case studies on both levels identify patterns of interaction between elite and mass

²⁷ This is of course a wide-ranging methodological discussion far beyond the scope of this paper. See Elster 2007 for a comprehensive discussion of this form of theorising, and Somerville & Bengtsson 2002 for a brief discussion of how it can be applied to housing studies.

²⁸ Bearing in mind that housing policy is largely about institutions, which blurs the distinction empirically.

²⁹ Dunleavy (1981) is another intensive two-level analysis, including both the national and local political processes behind mass housing in Britain.

actors that should be of relevance to the analysis of housing politics regardless of institutional differences over time and place.³⁰

Harloe (1995) is probably the most comprehensive individual contribution to comparative housing. Applying the general concept of 'structure of housing provision', Harloe investigates the historical development of social rented housing in six countries in the 20th century. The study is organised in five historical phases and is based to a large extent on secondary sources. Despite the number of cases and the long time-period covered the empirical analysis is both broad and deep, and it encompasses both politics and policy, and social structures as well as political actors and institutions. Though Harloe's theoretical model emphasises agents and power, only a subordinate role is conceded to actors and interaction in the housing arena. The main strength of the book is how the development of social housing in each country is placed in the context of the general social and political evolution in each country. Harloe's general conclusions are more structural than political, drawing out universal lines of development related to political economy (cf. discussion in Kemeny & Lowe 1998, pp. 167–168). His rich material would also lend itself to a more actor-oriented and open-ended discussion of housing politics and institutional design of social housing.

Kemeny (1995), analysing national rental systems, makes a distinction between an 'Anglo-Saxon' dualist rental market with a residual public rental sector, and a 'European' unitary model based on the integration of profit and non-profit renting systems. Both actors and institutions are in focus in Kemeny's case studies, and the development of the different market systems is seen as a result of an interaction between political actors, state and market institutions, economic development and housing discourse. Kemeny himself describes his approach in this study as 'policy constructivism' which appears to have some similarity to an actor-based analysis of housing politics (cf. Somerville & Bengtsson 2001 and response by Kemeny 2001b).

Studies of housing corporatism

Corporatism is a theoretical perspective which highlights actors, bargaining and institutions in a manner that should represent a challenge to the political imagination. A corporatist political system is characterised by close and stable ties between some privileged organisational actors and the state (see Schmitter 1981 and Williamson 1989 for formal definitions). Corporatist analysis should be of particular relevance to housing, with its dominant policy theory of state correctives to the market.³¹ In the 1980s a number of studies were published that applied a perspective of corporatism to housing provision (e.g. Flynn 1986, Heclø & Madsen 1987, Boddy 1989 and a theoretically and empirically sophisticated article by Lundqvist (1988); cf. also Saunders 1986; Schmidt 1989).

The general literature on corporatism often investigates the tripartite relation between state, business organisations and labour unions. In housing politics, with its orientation towards consumption, other organised interests may also acquire corporatist relations to the state, e.g. housing companies, building worker unions and mortgage lenders (Clapham, Kemp & Smith

³⁰ The authors relate their approach to critical realism, though only in the last chapter and not in a very elucidating manner (cf. criticism by Somerville 1994 and Lawson 2006, p. 57).

³¹ Quoting Kemeny: 'Because housing straddles both state and market, it is probable that vested market interests are more prominent in housing than in other welfare sectors. For this reason the housing market is likely to reflect the power balance between different interest groups particularly clearly, especially in comparison with other welfare sectors where the market still plays a much more limited role' (Kemeny 2006, p.1).

1990, pp. 10–13, Doling 1997, pp. 71–72). In the Scandinavian countries, with their well organised residents, even consumer organisations have been granted a bargaining position regarding housing policy with clear corporatist elements, in Sweden represented by the National Union of Tenants and in Denmark by the National Federation of Non-Profit Housing Associations.³² This, still surviving, consumer-oriented housing corporatism has recently been examined in a perspective of path dependence (Bengtsson 2004, Jensen 2006; cf. also below under historical institutionalism).³³

With these Scandinavian exceptions there have been fewer studies of housing and corporatism in the current period of privatisation and marketisation. However, with the growing impact on housing of EU institutions and policies we may soon witness a revival of corporatist perspectives – although this time on the European level (cf. Ghékière 2008, Elsinga, Haffner & van der Heijden 2008, Gruis & Priemus 2008).

Historical institutionalism and housing politics

Theories of *historical institutionalism* and *path dependence* appear to present a fruitful perspective for studying the interplay between political action and institutional conditions in housing.³⁴ The typical case of path dependence in a perspective of politics is where actors more or less deliberately design institutions at point A, institutions which at later points B serve as restraints to political decision-making, and thus make some policy alternatives impossible or implausible.³⁵ The mechanisms of path dependence may be summarised as efficiency, legitimacy and power, implicating that events at point A would make some alternatives appear to be either more efficient, more legitimate or more powerful at point B (North 1990, Hall & Taylor 1996, p. 945, Thelen 1999, pp. 394–396, Pierson 2000).³⁶

Perspectives of historical institutionalism are not new in housing studies.³⁷ An early application of path dependence is Kleinman (1996) who compares the development of

³² The Danish housing associations are to a large extent controlled by the tenants.

³³ Bengtsson (1995a) discusses in general terms how a perspective of thin rationality can be applied to the political role of housing organisations in terms of collective action, market power and corporatism. By analysing over time the interaction between housing organisations and other actors in the political arena, the market arena and the organisational arena, a historical web of critical junctures and resulting institutional and market development can be reconstructed, what Tsebelis (1990) calls ‘games of institutional design’.

³⁴ Historical institutionalism takes time seriously, ‘specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality’ (Pierson & Skocpol 2002, pp. 695–696). This does not necessarily imply covering long historical periods of time.

³⁵ Critics of path dependence have claimed that the concept says little more than ‘history matters’. To avoid this it has been suggested that path dependence should be defined rather strictly as ‘historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties’ (Mahoney 2000, pp. 507–508). In a more open-ended perspective path dependence can be seen as a historical pattern where a certain outcome can be traced back to a particular set of events on the basis of empirical observation and guided by some social theory (cf. Bengtsson 2009a).

³⁶ The specificities of housing as a good, and of tenures as institutions, seems to make path dependence perspectives particularly relevant in housing studies. One way to elaborate on the power mechanism is to apply Steven Lukes’ well-known ‘three faces of power’ (Lukes 1974), and distinguish between different forms of power-based path dependence. Earlier more ‘contingent’ events at point A may at point B have an effect on either decision-making, agenda-setting or perceptions (cf. Bengtsson 2009a).

³⁷ Besides Power’s book (Power 1993), which could just as well have been framed in terms of path dependence, in particular the work by Peter Malpass on the history of British housing provision deserve to be mentioned here (e.g. Malpass 2000, 2005). In a recent article Malpass stresses how history can help to explain current differences and similarities in social housing provision, ‘in terms of the size of the social sector, its trajectory to change (growth or decline), organisational forms, methods of financing and role in the housing system as a whole’ (Malpass 2008, pp. 15–16), i.e. some of the key questions of path dependence applied to housing.

housing provision in Britain, France and Germany from the mid-1970s. In all three countries he identifies a ‘bifurcation’ which has led to different policies regarding the middle mass of households and the impoverished minority. However, the economic, political and social forces of change in all three countries are mediated through very different institutions and political structures, which leave a profound impression on both the policy and its implementation (Kleinman 1996, pp. 180–181).

Lowe (2004, chap. 6) chooses a more politics-oriented approach to path dependence when he analyses the sometimes dramatic historical development of the British housing tenure structure. His key questions are why the country, by the end of the 20th century, became a nation of owner-occupiers, why it has developed such a large state rental sector, largely owned by local councils, and what happened to the 19th century private landlordism. Lowe identifies some critical junctures and highlights in particular the impact of the two world wars. Although modest in size, the study is a good example of how the politological imagination can contribute to our understanding of housing history.³⁸

A more comprehensive attempt is Bengtsson et al (2006), who compare the development of the – surprisingly different – housing regimes of five Nordic countries in a perspective of path dependence.³⁹ In the formative period of the Nordic housing regimes, between the turn of the century 1900 and the second world war, different solutions were chosen in each country in order to deal with the specific housing problems that occurred at different points of time. When more comprehensive programmes of housing policy were introduced after the war, it was often seen as efficient (or even taken for granted) by political actors that the already existing, if still undeveloped, organisations and institutions should be utilized to implement the new programmes. With the massive production of new housing between 1950 and 1980, the respective national housing regimes were successively consolidated and institutionalised.

In a historical comparison between housing in Australia and the Netherlands, Lawson (2006) applies a perspective of path dependency and relates it to a consistent ontology and epistemology of critical realism. Her two cases represent divergent housing trajectories, one dominated by sprawling home ownership, the other with social rental housing playing a significant role. Unlike Bengtsson et al. 2006, who compare tenure policy and politics, Lawson focuses on the historical and spatial definition of property rights, saving and investment, and labour and welfare relations (Lawson 2006, pp. 2–3). The geo-historical perspective, however, gives limited room to the role of politics.⁴⁰

Path dependence is often contrasted to retrenchment. Lindbom analyses interestingly how the radical state budget cuts of the 1990s in Swedish housing policy could be carried out with very little resistance. He explains the ‘successful’ retrenchment by the difficulty for political actors as well as the general public to observe financial cuts in a policy area that is so complex and non-transparent (Lindbom 2001, pp. 520–521). This complexity and unclear political responsibility is another important aspect of the policy theory of state correctives to the market.

³⁸ See Daunton 1987 for a more traditional historical account related to similar questions.

³⁹ See Bengtsson 2008 for a presentation of the main results in English.

⁴⁰ Some other examples of path dependence analysis of housing politics are Kemp (2000) on the housing benefit system in Britain, Kay (2005) on rent-setting in social housing, and Lévy-Vroelant, Reinprecht & Wassenberg (2008) on social housing in Austria, France and the Netherlands (cf. review in Bengtsson 2009a).

Studies of housing politics on the micro and meso levels

This section will comment on some studies of housing politics on lower levels, both the micro ‘street level’, where citizens/consumers meet public, private and semi-private providers of housing, and the meso ‘community level’, which represents the link between national housing policy and final outcomes in terms of individual and collective housing consumption. As already discussed, with reference to Torgersen (1987), the dominant policy theory of state correctives to the market means that the implementation of housing provision differs from that of other sectors. Summarised briefly citizens as residents are not welfare clients with formal rights as they are in the roles of e.g. school pupils, hospital patients, pensioners or recipients of social care.

The British exception

To some extent Britain represents an exception to this, which should be kept in mind considering the position of British perspectives in housing research. Here the management of social rented housing has been entrusted to local authorities as a direct responsibility. In other countries the corresponding function was carried out largely by other agencies, with only arms-length municipal influence (cf. Emms 1990, pp. 2–4). There are a number of interesting investigations of housing bureaucracies (e.g. Houlihan 1988) and in particular housing management in Britain (e.g. Clapham 1997, Somerville & Steele 1999, Franklin 2000, Clapham, Franklin & Saugères 2000).⁴¹ They all cover problems associated with the fair implementation of state allocation of a welfare state utility, but are not readily translated to a context of implementation by voluntary market contracts.

The Anglo-Saxon deviation is related to Kemeny’s distinction between a ‘command economy’ dualist rental system and the continental model of unitary rental markets. Other dualist rental systems tend to have only a minor means-tested rental sector with a more definite residual role (see Kemeny 1996, pp. 3, 10), which should make issues about housing bureaucracy and allocation less prominent than in the British case. Lately, with the ongoing residualisation of council housing and the expansion of housing associations in Britain, the institutional conditions of housing politics may be converging towards other European countries.⁴² According to Power (1993, p. 9) this will also make the European housing history of single-purpose independent landlords more relevant to Britain. One example of such converging interests may be the relatively young discourse on *hybrid organisations* in housing, i.e. organisations with both economic and non-economic goals (e.g. Priemus 2003, Mullins & Walker 2009; cf. Powell 1987).

In principle a clear distinction can be made between the micro level of direct provision where tenants meet management on markets and pseudo-markets and the meso level where the prerequisites of future implementation on the micro level is planned and negotiated. In the political practice, however, the difference is often more fluid, and some actors and institutions

⁴¹ British housing managers are probably the actors closest to Lipsky’s street-level bureaucrats that we can find in housing.

⁴² Thus, the ideas of new public management have left clear traces in the British housing sector (cf. Walker 1998), whereas in other countries the impact of NPM has been more concrete in other welfare state sectors, since the implementation of housing provision was seen already as the responsibility mainly of market actors.

have an impact that covers both levels. The following discussion will move from the micro level towards the meso level.⁴³

Tenant participation and urban movements in micro-level housing politics

The most important micro level issue of housing politics has to do with power and collective action on the individual estate, i.e. questions related to tenant participation and other forms of local cooperation. Such questions can be analysed in terms of very local politics.⁴⁴ In their broad empirical study from the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad identify three different models of participation: traditionalism, consumerism and citizenship; the relation between the three models is described as a ‘battle of ideas’, so the approach is primarily constructionist. However, the ‘political’ interaction between tenants, housing managers, councillors and tenants’ associations is also analysed and related to the arrangements of participation. The authors discuss their findings with reference to Clegg (1989) and his concept of ‘circuits of power’, where resources (including legitimacy), tactics and rules of the game are key elements (Cairncross, Clapham & Goodlad, 1997).

Cairncross, Clapham and Goodlad relate their analysis of tenant participation to theories about *citizenship*, and so does Jensen (1995) in her study of Danish social housing. This normative political concept has also been taken as point of departure in housing studies on other levels, often related to Marshall’s ideas about civil, political and social rights (Marshall 1950). A perspective of citizenship has been applied to issues about universal and selective national housing regimes (Bengtsson 2001), urban governance (García 2006), tenure security (Mullen et al. 1999), the inclusion of ethnic minorities in housing markets (Bowes, Dar & Sim 2000), and post-apartheid ethnic segregation (Lalloo 1998).

Bengtsson (2000) reanalyses earlier Swedish studies on collective action in housing estates applying a model of a self-reinforcing ‘cooperative circle’ moving from norms of cooperation via actual participation and local power resources to collective influence and then back to norms of cooperation. For cooperation to be successful and sustainable, tenants must have some real collective influence on the conditions in their estate, and at least some of the tenants must also be moved by some social norm of cooperation. An analysis based on thin rationality indicates that the crucial mechanism underlying local institutionalisation may be a norm of local utilitarianism (‘I take part if it is needed and if I can contribute to the collective good in my estate’). In some estates with higher and more demanding ambitions of cooperation more contract-like norms of reciprocity (‘If others cooperate, why shouldn’t I?’) also play an important role. ‘Reproductive activities’, such as information to tenants, study courses and common leisure activities are crucial in defining an estate as an arena where tenants do things together.

These studies focus on actors and institutions, so it is plausible to say that they have a perspective of housing politics, though at a very local level. This brings to the fore the concept of *democracy*. As a matter of fact the socio-geographic concentration of local resident organisations, and the fact that members residing in the same area share a broad common

⁴³ The micro level of the individual housing estate allows more clear-cut *housing* analysis. When we move towards larger geographical units a more differentiated set of actors and institutions are involved, e.g. representing social services, schools, culture and local business.

⁴⁴ They can also be part of a national housing policy, as in the last few decades has been the case in Britain (cf. Langstaff 1992).

interest in a defined territory should make housing an empirical field well suited for the study of social mechanisms of small-scale democratic interaction. Nevertheless the concept of democracy – essential to all political scientists – is surprisingly seldom used in housing studies on micro level, not even to shed light on and evaluate evident phenomena of participatory and deliberative democracy like tenant participation and housing cooperatives.⁴⁵

The formal contracts and the continuous social interaction between an estate owner and a group of residents related to a specific local housing area provide specific rules of the game and makes it plausible to define a local ‘demos’. However, collective action, cooperation and conflict over local politics and housing are not always confined to formal boundaries. The study of urban protest and *urban social movements*, inspired by Castells (1976, 1983) embraces both the micro and meso level. Grayson (1997) discusses social movements in Britain with a special focus on housing and Cooper & Hawtin (1997) outlines a conceptual framework for analysing community involvement in housing. However, the theoretically and empirically most impressive demonstration of political imagination in this genre may still be Michael Lipsky’s case studies of rent strikes in New York City and other forms of protest in American cities in the 1960s (Lipsky 1965, 1968). Lipsky’s conclusions about the probability of success when powerless groups go out in protest point out a number of tangible and symbolic aspects, which should be of general relevance.

Urban governance as meso-level housing politics

This takes us to the theme of urban planning and urban governance more generally, where the political goals of housing policy are supposed to be implemented. This is certainly a vast field of practice and research, and here political science has made more important contributions than in housing politics (see e.g. the contributions in Judge, Stoker & Wolman 1995 and Davis & Imbroscio 2009). A limited perspective of housing provision is not always very fruitful in this broader context – though the early local studies by Dunleavy (1981) and Dickens et al. (1985) prove that it sometimes may be.

More generally there is at least one important aspect that makes housing critical in urban governance and gives housing actors a special role in the games of planning and negotiation. The residents of an urban area are the closest we get to a local ‘demos’. They are the citizens who are directly affected by the ‘interdependent and autonomous’ negotiations, networks and partnerships where political and professional stakeholders are involved.⁴⁶ Tenure policy on the national level also has an impact here, since owner-occupants typically can be expected to have stronger veto power than rental tenants – provided that they can agree on strategies, as in the NIMBY cases.

There is certainly no lack of sociological and geographical studies of poor and deprived housing estates.⁴⁷ The academic interest in the local games of politics in these contexts has

⁴⁵ Important exceptions – and good examples – are Birchall (1988) on housing cooperatives in Britain and Jensen (1995) on Danish social housing governance. Glasze (2005) analyses gated neighbourhoods in a perspective of ‘shareholder democracy’. Birchall (1997) is a useful conceptual discussion of the micromechanics of participative democracy in housing.

⁴⁶ Bearing this in mind, the tension between local governance and democracy, which is an important subject in modern political science (e.g. Pierre 2000, Klijn & Skelcher 2007), is surprisingly seldom highlighted in housing studies on the meso level.

⁴⁷ Analyses in a perspective of social capital (Putnam 1993, 2000) sometimes may be said to represent a middle way between sociology and politics (e.g. Forrest & Kearns 2001, Middleton, Murie & Groves 2005, Dekker 2007).

been weaker.⁴⁸ One interesting example carried out with praiseworthy political imagination is Hertting's investigation of local governance networks in area renewal (Hertting 2003, 2007). He interprets network governance in urban renewal in thinly rationalistic terms as a 'battle of the sexes' game, where key actors have a preference for more cooperation, although they are repeatedly frustrated by both processes and outcome. Hertting's analysis clearly reveals how the network organisation of urban renewal offers a generous supply of social mechanisms of power, cooperation, conflict and negotiations, where the characteristics of local governance are more visible than in most other political contexts.

Studies with a normative perspective

As mentioned empirical studies of housing policy often have a normative touch, though not always openly so and only seldom related to the politico-philosophical discourse about justice, freedom and natural rights.⁴⁹ The main exception is the work of Peter King, who has consistently deliberated the implications for housing of these concepts, often from a libertarian point of view (e.g. King 1996, 1998, 2003a, 2003b). For example he has applied to housing the ideas of Robert Nozick (1974), the leading philosopher of negative freedom. This project is certainly consistent with the dominant policy theory of housing provision where market contracts are seen as the main distributive mechanism.

Another line of argument on housing and social justice accepts the dominant policy theory of state correctives to the market – in the spirit of Michael Walzer's idea about 'spheres of justice' where different social goods ought to be distributed in different ways, depending on how they are socially defined in a certain historical and cultural context (Walzer 1983, pp. 3–10). This constructionist philosophy raises the question about what arguments more precisely would make intervention in housing markets acceptable. This is discussed by Bengtsson (1995b) departing from Amartya Sen's argument about the moral standing of the market (Sen 1985). Recently McNaughton (forthcoming) has discussed homelessness in relation to Martha Nussbaum's 'ten essential functions required for human life', which is also based on Sen and his capabilities approach to social justice (McNaughton forthcoming; cf. Nussbaum 1992).

Normative philosophical principles have sometimes been used to interpret and evaluate the housing ideology and policies of political actors. In a perspective of politics, the ideologies of governments and political parties are of special interest. In a focus article in *Housing, Theory and Society* Peter King examines the relationship between conservative social theory and the housing policies of the British Conservative party between 1979 and 1997. He finds some consistency, but also some inconsistencies, in particular in the activist way that the policy was executed. As indicated in some of the comments, what complicates the analysis is that neither normative theory, nor party ideologies more than seldom refer specifically to housing. Furthermore, party ideology is always mixed up with pragmatic politics (King 2001, with comments and author's response). The problem of separating ideology from practical policy also complicates the attempts that have been made to relate Swedish post-war housing policy to general theories of justice and rights (e.g. Bengtsson 2001).

⁴⁸ Keating, Krumholz & Star (1996) is one largely housing-oriented volume, where political analysis has been given some space.

⁴⁹ Inversely modern liberal philosophers like Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick and Barry, seldom relate their principles to specific goods like housing. Two other normative political concepts, 'citizenship' and 'democracy', were discussed in the previous section.

Concluding discussion

This paper has discussed and to some extent evaluated empirical research on housing politics on different levels, together with some relevant conceptual and normative contributions. This concluding section considers which approaches and lines of research are the most promising and how they could be developed.

The *conceptual* discourse on the social and political definition of housing policy has received little attention in recent years, although it would clearly stand to gain from a stronger empirical attachment. Simultaneously housing policies and institutions, and even more in other welfare state sectors, have gone through considerable change in most countries. So far this development has not made the policy theory of state correctives to the market more obsolete, rather the ideas of new public management may have moved other policy fields closer to housing provision in this respect. The recent EU interventionism in the national systems of housing provision (see Ghékière 2008) also indicates that this may be a discourse worth revisiting. The socio-political construction of housing policy in different national and international contexts may be investigated both at citizen and political elite levels and using both qualitative and quantitative methodology.

On the *macro level* of national politics, the European development may lead to a revival of perspectives of corporatism in the study of EU housing politics. This can be combined with historical institutionalism and path dependence, which appears to be a particularly promising approach to housing with its generally high degree of sluggishness. Another theoretical perspective, which has so far been relatively absent in studies of housing politics, is *framing analysis* (e.g. Goffman 1974, Stone 1989, Benford & Snow 2000, Fischer 2003). Some variants of framing theory offer a promising combination of action and discourse analysis, which should be extremely fruitful in the study of housing policy and politics.⁵⁰

Approaches of historical institutionalism and framing analysis could also be used to shed more light on the complexities of housing politics on the *micro and meso levels* (see Bengtsson 2009a for some examples of path dependence analysis on these levels). One interesting possibility would be to examine theories of urban governance empirically by means of historical process tracing and open-ended path dependence analysis – if this should be labelled housing or urban studies is a minor concern. A renewed interest in urban protest and urban movements can also be predicted. As pointed out by Pickvance (2003) the writing in this field should relate more from general social movement theory and its theoretical frameworks such as resource mobilization and political opportunity studies.⁵¹ Empirically there is still a lot to be learned from Lipsky (1968, 1970) and his studies of protest in American cities.

⁵⁰ Framing analysis has to some extent been applied to the study of homelessness and affordable housing (e.g. Schön & Rein 1994, chap. 6, Croteau & Hicks 2003, Goetz 2008). Similar perspectives have also been used in constructionist discussions on macro-level housing policy (e.g. Kemeny 1995), however an explicit liaison with the framing discourse should add more precision to this type of analysis of symbolic politics. Ideational and ideological institutionalism are other related approaches (Blyth 2003, Hay 2004).

⁵¹ Political opportunity structure has been defined as ‘... consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure (Tarrow 1994, p. 85). A perspective of political opportunity structures emphasises conditions like the openness of the political system, the stability of elite alignments and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996, p. 27).

Moving towards the micro level, the analysis of hybrid organisations as political actors and institutions is a relatively young branch of housing studies, which could be of great importance for our understanding of the conditions of housing politics, policy and implementation. In contrast to what is the case with hybrid organisations in other sectors, the geographical concentration of the residents brings to the fore issues of participative and deliberative democracy, which further complicates the internal goal conflicts.

More generally, the concept of democracy should be applied – and problematised – more consistently in housing studies on the micro and meso levels. The discourse on models of democracy is a well developed theoretical speciality in political science, which should be of relevance to several lines of housing research, e.g. the analysis of tenant participation and local governance. Both these applications have to do with ‘democracy in small scale’ (cf. Dahl & Tufte 1973), which also deserves to be given more attention in political science.

In *normative analysis* the most promising way forward may be a cautious and conscientious application of Nussbaum’s moderate – and socially constructed – essentialism along the lines suggested by McNaughton (forthcoming) in her discussion on homelessness.

Should the modest role of political science in housing studies be deplored?⁵² As mentioned now and then in the paper, the politological imagination could sometimes contribute to a more penetrating and theory-based interpretation of housing actors and institutions and to open-ended middle range theorising in terms of thinly rationalistic logics, patterns and mechanisms. Again this type of imagination is neither an inherent, nor an exclusive quality of political scientists.

Political scientists could definitely contribute to the application of central political concepts to housing. Even though ‘democracy’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘social justice’ are often used well in housing studies, a stronger involvement of political scientists would link these applications more firmly to the broad discourses on these concepts in the discipline.

Inversely, political science could take advantage of applications in housing studies. Jim Kemeny has often pointed out that theory development in the disciplines stands to gain from such applications (Kemeny 1992). In political science more specifically, conceptual and empirical studies of housing politics could contribute to the development of concepts like democracy, citizenship and social justice, in particular in small scale and on local levels. Furthermore, micro, meso and macro level studies of housing politics could contribute to politological theorising about local governance, hybrid organisations and market-oriented politics and policies more generally.

⁵² This is discussed in more detail in Bengtsson (2009b).

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