Housing and Communities Research Network

Housing and Communities is an important arena for current policy and practice challenges in relation to welfare reform, public expenditure reductions, homelessness, housing supply shortages, financial inclusion, anti-social behaviour, worklessness, Localism, the ‘Big Society’ and the role of third sector in service delivery. Research and knowledge transfer on these topics plays a key role in the University’s civic engagement agenda.

Housing and Communities has long been a key area of interest of research and teaching at The University of Birmingham in the School of Social Policy, and building on the 40 year tradition of housing research in the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies. Housing and Communities are central to the research agendas of the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) and the Centre for Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM) and the Public Management Academy. Interest in housing and communities is also a key theme for Geography and Earth Sciences, History, Local Government Studies, Law and Public Health.

The aims of this research network are to:
- improve links and build an active research community
- improve awareness of interests of researchers on housing and communities across the University and partners in West Midlands
- provide a stimulus for new research partnerships, collaborative writing and joint funding proposals.

We are inviting researchers from across the University and from the housing sector in the West Midlands to our 4th seminar—8 February 2016. Please book in advance online at www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/events/index.aspx

Dr Anita Blessing joined the Housing and Communities research group in late 2015 for a Marie Curie Fellowship with Professor David Mullins. She began her career in Australia, training as an urban planner and then working on public housing redevelopments, large community renewal projects and state government social housing policy reforms. She later completed a research masters at the University of Amsterdam and New York University, and a University of Amsterdam PhD (2014) that focused on market oriented reforms of social housing systems, and on organisational hybridity within these reforms. Since 2012, she has worked with David Mullins as a coordinator of the ENHR Working Group: Social Housing Institutions, Organisations and Governance. Her publications include:


Chair: David Mullins Professor of Housing Policy, Housing and Communities Research Group


Seminar 4:
Reinvest: Financing Affordable Housing Under Localism
Dr Anita Blessing

8 February 2016 – 4.15 - 5.45
Room 710, Muirhead Tower, University of Birmingham

This seminar explores the urban governance challenge of motivating institutional investment in new affordable rental housing. At a time of growing social vulnerability, many European cities lack adequate supplies of affordable rental housing for low to middle-income households. National policies promoting fiscal austerity and localism have placed civic actors such as municipalities and housing associations under increasing pressure to finance housing for these groups commercially, whilst still preserving affordability. As potential investors, state policy interest is targeting large financial institutions, such as the banks and pension funds that manage local household, corporate and government savings. However, unlike some of their predecessors, moved by a ‘home bias’ to reinvest locally, contemporary institutional investors are independent, profit-oriented and equipped to shift capital globally. Inherent contradictions between profit and affordability present a governance challenge, long familiar to urban policymakers in the US, where similar reforms of rental housing assistance occurred decades earlier.

While existing European research tends to focus on financially incentivizing investment, this seminar draws on the concept of organisational hybridity to bring into consideration a broader range of investment drivers. It sets out to better understand how opportunities for investment in affordable rental housing connect to the internal logics and structures of institutional investors, and how government policies, both incentives (‘carrots’) and regulations (‘sticks’), help to forge these connections. Drawing on cases of institutionally funded affordable rental housing projects in the tight rental markets of US and European cities, the seminar will explore the multi-level governance arrangements that help connect these projects to finance. US policy innovations to motivate institutional investment in affordable housing will be touched upon, including federal tax credits, federal community reinvestment regulation, and municipal responsible banking acts. By comparing these governance structures with emerging European innovations, the seminar will explore the potential for urban policy to empower civic actors to negotiate finance for local affordable rental housing.

4.15 Introduction and Welcome: Chair David Mullins
4.20 Dr Anita Blessing
5.00 Questions and Discussion
5.45 Close

After the seminar, there will be time for informal networking in the University’s Staff House bar.