

### **Housing and the importance of community relationships**

The importance of housing to adequate standards of living is recognised globally. Housing as a human right has long been recognised within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while the United Nation's New Urban Agenda emphasises the importance of inhabiting and producing "just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all." Yet, there remain enduring and evolving global crises, as citizens are denied access to, or displaced from, accessible, affordable and secure housing on a range of social, economic, environmental and political grounds.

There are, of course, significant variations within and between regions, nations, continents and economies, as well as between different population demographics. It is the challenge of housing scholarship to grapple with these variations and to understand relevant processes, conditions, circumstances and solutions. In this latest issue of *Housing and Society*, we are delighted to showcase a range of scholarship that interrogates exactly these issues, documenting how housing experiences can be mediated by age, income, social mixing and community relationships. This set of papers reveals the circumstances of different groups and the strategies they commit to in order to secure appropriate housing, but also the processes and circumstances that prohibit access to or maintenance of secure and sustainable housing.

Yadav (2023) explores the experiences of older women living with low pensions and their strategies to age in place. Recognising the relationship between financial security and housing security, Yadav's qualitative work highlights the interconnections between housing and welfare systems, finding that participants needed to supplement pensions to afford housing and living costs. While for some this caused difficulty, the participants in Yadav's work highlighted the importance of social relationships and arrangements to older women with lower incomes, including familial and community support networks. The article gives new insights into how accessing appropriate housing is not solely about the physical shelter, but about generation of and benefit from community cohesion and belonging.

Yadav's paper, focusing on Sweden, complements Warner et al's (2023) research on a proposed co-housing neighbourhood, exploring the perspectives of potential residents and their interests in this alternative tenure type. Findings revealed that potential residents perceived a number of benefits, including strong and supportive community relationships, affordability, and design that would facilitate safety, security and social inclusivity. Warner et al's study complements extant evidence on alternative housing models (Mullins and Moore, 2018; Lang et al, 2020), which highlight the potential for co-housing to combat societal issues, such as segregation and exclusion (Kvietkute and Hauge, 2022). Their article

extends existing scholarship by offering a unique insight into the early motivations of residents during project planning and development.

Warner et al's vision of housing that promotes inclusion and social relationships, is particularly important in the context of Rodríguez Cortés' (2023) study of urban segregation in Mexico and the consequences for low-income residents amid attempts to alter socio-spatial organisation of populations. Efforts to increase spatial proximity of group from different social classes may not actually result in integration or tolerance. Rodríguez Cortés' work highlights ways in which public space is used and appropriate to the detriment of lower-income, longer standing residents, and ways in which urban sociability is limited by the absence of common spaces for encounters and interactions among different socio-economic groups. This is an important contribution, as even in urban renewal processes that seek to engender change to urban segregation, "the impact of urban segregation on social relations and inclusion is not clearly visible."

This analysis of the relative influence of the physical form on community relationships is important and juxtaposes with Kirk et al's (2023) qualitative exploration of the experiences of residents accessing permanent supportive housing. Crucially, resident relationships were valued as fundamental to feelings of stability and security. Housing provides important shelter and meets needs, while providing a platform for interactions between residents and neighbours within a project and the fostering of a sense of community. This, it is argued, enables positive life changes for residents that have previously experienced homelessness.

The above analysis has focused on the importance of community relationships to the ability, or lack thereof, of people to access and maintain secure housing in inclusive neighbourhoods. This is just one facet that unifies the work published in this issue. Each article also makes its own contribution to more specific fields of research, whether related to the appetite for new alternative housing models, the interaction between housing and welfare systems, the nuance and rhythm of processes of urban renewal and the extent to which social mixing is achieved, or to the factors that enable successful 'Housing First' approaches to tackling homelessness.

As with the lived experience of housing, housing scholarship works best within community. We have recently advertised for three new Associate Editors to join the journal, a move with the intention of expanding the geographical community of the journal and to provide greater frequency of communication with our community. We are grateful to our many peers who submitted their CV's for consideration, it was humbling to see the breadth and depth of scholars willing to serve the Housing & Society community.