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### *Housing in Ireland: Beyond the markets*

Lorcan Sirr (Ed.) (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration; 2022; ISBN: 978-1-910393-41-3; 313 pp; €25)

*Housing in Ireland: Beyond the Markets* is a collection of essays written by various contributors and edited by Lorcan Sirr, who is a senior lecturer in housing, planning and development in Technological University Dublin. The book, published by the Institute of Public Administration, seeks to explore housing policy from a broader social policy perspective, showing that many policy areas are often erased in favour of an economic narrative when it comes to the housing debate. Each chapter reflects on a different issue relating to the housing sector such as law, geography, social sciences and town planning. The contributors come from institutions such as the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

*Housing in Ireland*, unlike most publications and discourse on housing policy, does not revolve around typical market-related issues such as price and value, but instead brings to light the ‘forgotten’ issues of housing. Housing is central to social policy, so it is important to evaluate all aspects of social policy in relation to housing. The book addresses aspects of housing that are ‘frequently misunderstood (planning), dismissed (minorities), relegated (countryside) or not present (gender) in housing debates in Ireland’ (p. xv).

*Housing in Ireland* addresses these issues in an accessible and clear manner, proving that housing is an important feature in every facet of life, not just in the economic and market sphere, and that the confluence of housing on other policy areas must be considered when creating truly sustainable, affordable and equitable housing. The main purpose of the book is to argue that good housing policy is good social policy and that, in order for housing policy to meet the needs of

citizens through ensuring sustainable, available and affordable housing, policymakers need to look further than the market and also consider housing from a social perspective.

The book begins with a chapter on housing and regulation. Deirdre Ní Fhloinn, the author, through her description of housing legislation, criticises the current regulation frameworks and argues that they are not functioning for all. Regulation of housing in Ireland is characterised by significant gaps in coverage, with serious consequences for the lives and health of people affected. This essay sets up the tone of the book and provides a contextual understanding of the basics of the regulation of housing, something that is not often considered yet is important for the system as a whole.

The following chapters, while discussing separate topics, all interlink with each other as some issues spill over. Suzanne Meade explores the interconnections between housing and transport and the negative and positive impacts that our home location can have on our travel choices as well as our health, which is something that is rarely discussed in relation to housing. This chapter ties in well with others such as the 'Housing and Health' and 'Housing and Rural Ireland' chapters. For homes in rural areas with limited transport and access, active travel opportunities such as walking and cycling are limited due to distance and road safety. This therefore creates negative health impacts, as well as impacting on housing. Sustainable transport, commuting, and health and well-being trade-offs should not have to be made in order to have a functional home.

For example, one-off houses, which frequently require car ownership, may negatively impact people's health and well-being. This argument carries over into Mark Scott and Liam Heaphy's chapter on rural Ireland, where dispersed one-off housing has been a planning concern for decades. They discuss the need to re-examine the application of 'market-based tools' to housing policy in villages and rural areas as dispersed one-off housing has landscape impacts as well as environmental costs. Housing in the countryside is interconnected with 'wider economic, social, and environmental systems integral to place-making, quality of life and well-being in rural places'. This viewpoint is forcibly articulated in the chapters by Meade, and by Scott and Heaphy.

The relationship between housing policy and human rights, in particular its impact on minority groups such as Travellers and refugees, is dealt with throughout the book. *Housing in Ireland* includes essays that identify groups who are disproportionately

impacted by homelessness and housing adversity. Rebecca Keatinge and James Rooney, in their chapter 'Housing and Minorities', find that a particular focus must be placed on ensuring that barriers to minorities, such as Travellers and those living in Direct Provision, are removed and there is 'fairer and more equal access to appropriate and adequate accommodation for all groups' (p. 84). This is further reflected in the chapter on 'Housing and Rights' by Padraic Kenna, who notes that the ultimate challenge is to ensure that housing rights can be enjoyed by all. Kenna argues that while Ireland does provide good-quality housing to most of the population, gaps still exist when it comes to access to affordable and social housing, which therefore alienates many minorities from the housing market (p. 130). The essay 'Housing and Gender' by Eva Kail and Sabina Riss examines the concept of gender mainstreaming and planning in housing, which means 'identifying and systematically recording different needs and promoting equal opportunities for different groups in society' (p. 134). They use the example of the Frauen-Werk-Stadt (Women-Work-City) I and II housing projects in Vienna, where new housing developments were built with gender-sensitive urban design and the everyday needs of women in mind; for example, their role in respect of caring and the importance of security and safety. It is the largest housing project in Europe applying women-oriented housing and urban development criteria with a wide range of integrated local supply such as doctors and a kindergarten. A common thread throughout the book is that Irish housing policy requires a focus on ensuring equality, not just quality, for all groups in society.

Housing has changed dramatically over time, and is shaped by trends and the political philosophy and ideology of the government that is in power at any given time. Housing policy can follow a neoliberal approach in which the state enables marketisation and the commodification of housing or it can follow a more welfare-oriented approach with increased state funding. The chapters 'Housing and Political Philosophy' by Sinéad Kelly and 'Housing and Policymaking' by Paul Umfreville recognise that there is a lack of consensus on the role of housing, whether it should be an economic commodity or a home for society (p. 107). In Ireland, the contributors contend, there is a certain path dependency in respect of housing policy, one that is influenced by the innate conservatism of Irish politics. As a result, the focus has always been on 'treating the symptoms of a housing crisis rather than the causes of that dysfunction' (p. 113). A common objective in the book is to outline how it is the underlying ideology and

philosophy of housing that must be addressed. It is argued that this is crucial in tackling Ireland's housing crisis and promoting structural change. In the 'Housing and the State' and 'Housing and Homeownership' chapters the tendency of the state to promote homeownership is shown even though, in practice, housing has become more nuanced with a shift towards private renting in recent years. The recurring theme of path dependency is demonstrated here again as proposals in respect of a move away from the pro-homeownership rhetoric and a reliance on the private sector remain limited in an Irish context.

*Housing in Ireland* is a valuable resource for policy practitioners, academics and those who are seeking to gain a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of housing policy in Ireland. Each chapter, complete with an extensive bibliography, provides scope for further research and acts as a good basis for each respective topic. The individual chapters of the book could be entire books in their own right and they should be developed in further research. *Housing in Ireland* provides a reliable starting point for further delving into the subject of housing and how it impacts on not just economic policy but also social policy. The book is modern and current, and discusses central issues such as the implications of the right to housing included in the Constitution.

The book is distinct in that it does not focus on the market aspect of housing, and discusses lesser acknowledged themes that have as much of an impact on housing as the market does. Financialisation and other economic-related issues concerning housing are already widely considered in housing policy debates, so it is refreshing to bring different perspectives into the realm of housing.

Alice Kelly