

Book review:

Housing Politics in the United Kingdom: Power, Planning and Protest

Brian Lund (2016), Bristol: Policy Press

By: Tatiana Moreira de Souza, Oxford Brookes University

At a time when Brexit negotiations tops public concern, all other issues, although newsworthy, seem to be on a standstill. Housing, however, has been a recurrent topic of debate. The Grenfell Tower fire and its aftermath have prompted a nation-wide debate around issues related to affordability and secure housing, and the recent sharp increase in homeless deaths in England and Wales has drawn attention not only to the acute housing shortage, which has contributed to housing being unaffordable to many young adults, but also to intergenerational inequalities, something that was also a hot topic during the 2017 elections.

With this in mind, a book about the politics around housing could not have been more timely. Brian Lund examines the main actors involved in the political processes that influence housing outcomes. Housing is labelled a 'wicked' problem (v) and this is demonstrated through a rich historical overview of the struggles for power between the major political parties, interest groups and territorial electoral politics. Lund's extensive knowledge of social policy and housing is evidenced by the richness of the material used and the levels of detail in which certain important historical events are recounted. Nonetheless, the book's subtitle, "power, planning and protest", although appealing, seems to promise a bit more than the book can deliver, much due to the fact that these themes are analysed in a rather idiosyncratic manner.

The book starts by exploring an amalgam of topics and themes, such as "Globalisation" and "Capitalism" and outlining the numerous interest groups, think tanks, major political parties and institutions which influence housing policy in the United Kingdom in one way or another. Although these seems to be designed as information only, the first chapter also 1 sets out the book's analytical framework, grounded on 'new' institutionalism, public-choice theory and social constructionism, which, according to the author, allows for a more systematic focus on the actors involved in housing politics. The subsequent chapters are chronologically organised and structured around significant social and economic transformations and the response from different actors, with a focus to the way these are problematised and shaped by them. Chapters 2 and 3 discusses land politics and urban renewal, and chapters 4 to 7 describe changing

attitudes towards the three main housing tenures – the private rented sector (chapter 4), homeownership (chapter 5) and the social rented sector, which has been split into local authority housing (chapter 6) and housing associations (chapter 7). Chapter 8 examines structural-agency constructions around homelessness and, finally, chapter 9, examines the different paths being taken in housing policy by the three devolved administrations in the UK.

Lund effectively covers an issue which is often overlooked in discussions around housing – that of land. The devotion of a whole chapter for it was not only refreshing but the chapter itself effectively highlights the tensions between the preservation of green belts – popular with the majority of the electorate – and the need to build more homes, as well as the lack of transparency in the land market. Another highlight of the book is chapter 9 which offers a brief, but very enlightening, overview of the political factors that are shaping housing policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since devolution. Finally, not only does the book bring relatively fresh data – with the conclusion covering the period shortly after Theresa May became Prime Minister in 2016 – but it is also jam-packed with interesting quotes by policy actors and comments in passing by the author which contribute to an entertaining read.

If there is something missing from the discussion – given the time the book was published – is the shift in the planning system towards viability-based arrangements spurred by the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is having a detrimental impact on the delivery of affordable housing (see Colenutt *et al.*, 2015). Another issue that could have been further developed is that related to one of the themes of the book: protest. Although Lund touches on protests over the years, from rent strikes in Glasgow and Leeds to tenants' campaigns against Housing Action Trusts (HAT) during Thatcher's Third Government, there was no mention to recent campaigns in London – such as the Heygate and Aylesbury Estates in Elephant & Castle in London – against estate redevelopment and gentrification,

This book will certainly indulge those with an interest in social policy and history, urban studies and political science; however, as the author rightly explains, it should be read as a companion to other material which 'adopts a more conventional approach, concentrating on housing policy outcomes' (iv), such as his own *Understanding Housing Policy* (currently at its third edition).

References:

COLENUTT, R. COCHRANE, A. and FIELD, M. (2015), 'The rise and rise of viability assessment', *Town and Country Planning*, 84, 453–58.