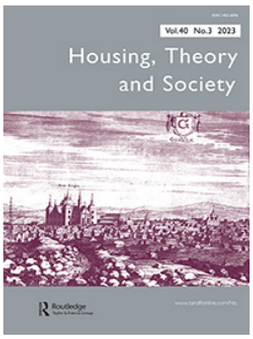

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Stigma, Cladding, and Modular Housing: Resident Experiences of Dublin's "Rapid Build" Scheme

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how stigma is constructed and deconstructed through linguistic and aesthetic dimensions of "Rapid Build" housing in Dublin, Ireland. Through analyses of in-depth interviews and focus groups with residents and stakeholders, we explore how the nomenclature and brick-clad modular construction of the builds influenced residents' experiences of stigma. Emphasizing the importance of the symbolic dimensions of housing materialities in mediating stigma, we argue resident experiences reflect the importance of understanding relationships between social housing construction and stigma power in three interrelated ways. First, the nomenclature and materiality of housing has a profound effect on social imaginaries of residents and their self-perceptions. Second, stigmatized groups are not devoid of agency within constructions of stigma, and are both actors in the embedding of, and resistance to, its production. Third, engaging with residents' experiences is integral to better understanding, and resisting, the role of architecture in the "stigma machine".

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Housing; stigma; homelessness; rapid build; modular; cladding; Ireland

Introduction

Disinvestment in social housebuilding has contributed to a severe housing crisis in Ireland and significant rise in family homelessness since 2014 (Murphy and Hearne 2019). While the political will to address the crisis is lacking, there is some, albeit limited, evidence of state-led building. Dublin City Council's (DCCs) Rapid Build modular housing scheme began in 2016 and, to date, has led to 423 completions from the original target of 1,500. The scheme provides permanent social housing for a mix of homeless families, and families on the social housing waiting list.

In this paper, we foreground residents' experiences of moving into the first three iterations of the Rapid Build scheme, in the north Dublin suburbs of Ballymun and Finglas, and south Dublin suburb of Ballyfermot. All the formerly homeless residents emphasized their desire to "blend in" and not "stick out", as several interviewees phrased it. For this reason, interviews tended to centre on the external public-facing aspects of the housing rather than their out of sight interior features.[1] Irish social housing has been deemed "a prime candidate for stigmatisation" given models of public housing delivery

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are ordinarily provided in "mono-tenure developments, with distinctive design and nomenclature and therefore identifiable as spatially and culturally distinctive from private housing" (Norris et al 2019, 257). The Rapid Build scheme both falls into, but also out of this provision orthodoxy, and is revealing of the (de)stigmatizing impacts it had for its new residents.

Although our study explored a range of ways residents experienced their newly-built houses (see Nowicki et al 2018, 2019), in this paper the linguistic and aesthetic dimensions of the Rapid Build scheme are foregrounded. As Tunstall has noted, "relatively little attention has been paid to social housing residents" aesthetic judgements' of their homes (2020, 78) – an omission this paper seeks to redress. It encompasses the study of stigma as a subjective experience and as an attributional process rooted in the housing scheme's naming and design. It brings to the fore how the (re)production of stigma is intertwined with subjective interpretations of aesthetic, discursive and exterior design issues related to housing.

Through analyses of in-depth interviews and focus groups with residents and professional stakeholders, we explore how the nomenclature and brick-clad modular construction of the builds influenced residents' relationship to, and experiences of stigma, as "a classificatory form of power" (Tyler and Slater 2018, 722). Residents' perspectives are especially important to understanding the "process of exiting from homelessness" which has received much less scholarly attention than "becoming homeless" (Chamberlain and Johnson 2018, 1246). The housing they move into, not just homelessness itself, has the potential to label, to stigmatize, and to still "disqualify people from full social acceptance" (Goffman 1990, 9). Yet certain scheme characteristics can also have de-classificatory and thus de-stigmatizing power. Furthermore, we highlight the intertextuality of stigma's production. Understanding how and why stigma is attached to particular kinds of housing requires, we suggest, a semiotic approach. We argue that values of good, bad, aspirational, or stigmatized are attached to housing through relational meaning making systems. That is to say, the meanings attached to housing are structured not just by their material properties, but by imaginaries of how they relate to other contemporary and historical housing.

The first empirical section of the paper concentrates on two key linguistic aspects of the scheme which influenced residents' imaginations of, and viewpoints on, the speed and quality of the builds. They are "Rapid Build" and "modular". Both terms were held in low esteem by residents, and were initially felt to add to long-standing stigma they had carried with them. Both re-evoked negative connotations of quickly erected, short-term "prefab" post war housing; a devalued technology which connoted their own devaluing by society.

In the second empirical section we turn to aesthetics. We hone in on the brick cladding of residents' new modular homes, which held an unanticipated significance in constructing a secure sense of home. As residents discussed with us, the external presence of brick on their houses worked to counteract some of the reservations and stigmatizing features they had identified regarding the naming, appearance, and perceived quality of the modular houses.

The paper concludes by encouraging housing scholars, architects and policymakers to pay greater attention to the role of the nomenclature and external aesthetics of social housing design and provision, including by considering where housing will be placed

within semiotic systems that link housing aesthetics and typologies to stigmatized and aspirational identities. We argue that these intertextual linguistic and material constructions play a part in the maintenance of, and emancipation from, the stigmatization of social housing and its occupants.

The Classificatory Power of Housing: Stigma, Symbolism and Materiality

In this section, we explain our approach to stigma as "a classificatory form of power" (Tyler and Slater 2018, 722) as revealed through the interconnected prisms of symbolism and materiality. The nomenclature of building technologies and materials are part of the "interpellative fabric of everyday life" in which "abject figurations" emerge (Tyler 2013, 9). Exploring the naming and external design of housing schemes is an endeavour with inherent ties to the psychosocial nature of stigma given that bodies and homes share "common features and fates which affect the sense of self" (McDowell 2007, 93). Housing and stigma therefore have performative (Cuny 2019; Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira 2014) as well as representative power (Tyler 2013).

Residents' relationship with stigma as a multidimensional concept is also forged through the materiality of the housing they exit homelessness into. Psychological understandings of stigma "often focus on individual experiences of being stigmatised in ways that occlude an understanding of stigma as a material force, a structural and structuring form of power" (Tyler 2020, 9). "Stigma power" is written through the materiality of social housing as substandard and othered, which in turn can gnaw away at self-esteem and dignity. There is a need therefore to "take the force of the material more seriously" in studies of social housing and lived experiences of buildings/architecture (Lees and Baxter 2011, 107). Indeed, assumptions that homeless families are not concerned with the type of materials from which their homes are constructed is inaccurate and lazy (Hayes 1999). The "physical characteristics of the housing" and negative images of it from outsiders is something social housing residents are often very aware of and "can have a real impact on their everyday lives and wellbeing" (Palmer et al. 2004, 414). Equally, residents are impacted by how their homes are located, by themselves and by outsiders, in relation to other contemporary and historical housing forms and their meanings. In the case of Dublin's Rapid Build housing, residents were particularly affected by how their homes were imagined in proximity to post war "prefab" housing.

Materiality matters, and this is acutely the case in new schemes which probe at the continuing conflict between "traditional architecture" and prefabricated production. This conflict is longstanding (Hayes 1999; Piroozfar et al. 2013) and largely rooted in slum clearance policies and the Fordist-Keynesian housing experiments of the mid-twentieth century. Originally conceived as utopian responses to slum conditions and the destruction of housing and infrastructure during World War II, longstanding negative connotations of prefabricated and modular-design housing are partly the consequence of their sharp material decline. In the Irish context, the Ballymun estate, built in 1965 and demolished in 1985, demonstrates most clearly the speed at which prefabricated, concrete estates became subject to material decay. Like many social housing estates of this period, the Ballymun estate was initially developed as a "grandiose public spectacle" showcasing these new building technologies and signalling the end of abhorrent slum conditions (Boyle 2005, 183). Financial crisis and local authority cuts of the 1970s mean that the

Ballymun estate quickly began to fall into disrepair. This was exacerbated by schemes that renewed emphasis on homeownership, including the 1985 Surrender Grant Scheme, which paid IR£5,000 to citizens prepared to move out of the social housing sector. This led to the departure of residents with the most financial and social capital, leaving the most impoverished and vulnerable remaining in prefabricated estates such as Ballymun (Boyle 2005). As a result of near-total financial disinvestment through the 1970s and 80s, residents struggled to live in homes that often suffered from damp, decay and lack of central heating. This has been the lived experience for many residents of prefabricated housing, particularly in Ireland and the UK, understandably resulting in a now culturally entrenched association of prefabricated housing as materially poor quality.

Yet with technological advances it is increasingly the case that the apparent drawbacks of prefabrication are ones of perception alone (O'Neill et al. 2016). Despite the widening usage of prefabricated construction methods across many world regions, from continental Europe to East Asia, in Britain and Ireland, "there is still a stigma from past failures" and "old arguments" remain on cost and quality of traditional versus prefabricated modular builds (O'Neill et al. 2016, 209). This is very much the case for Dublin, described as "a city of bricks" and home to domestic architecture from the 18th-early 20th century comprised almost entirely of the material (Roundtree 2007, 61). In short, traditional conceptions of "good" housing being constructed from bricks and mortar remain dominant, despite growing evidence that modular construction is an efficient and high-quality method. Importantly, we can see how meanings attached to Rapid Build housing arise from the semiotic systems their materials are discursively located within. Whereas in some places and contexts modular and rapid-construction buildings are conceived as aspirational (for example Tiny Homes in the USA or the Net Zero homes constructed by Bill Gate's company Breakthrough Energy), Dublin's Rapid Build housing has not been valued in relation to such housing. It has instead been stigmatized through negative associations with historical prefab housing and unfavourable comparison with brick-built homes.

By examining viewpoints of residents from the first three iterations of the Rapid Build scheme, more nuanced insights are offered regarding this problematic binary between traditional and prefabricated housing. As Figures 1 and 2 show, the upper finish of the Ballymun development (the first of the Rapid Build schemes) is grey cladding; whereas in Finglas and Ballyfermot the entirety of the external finish used brick cladding. This difference may seem unremarkable, banal even, but the interviews we conducted in Finglas spoke strongly to the symbolic importance of the full-brick render in reducing stigma. Indeed, the decision to fully clad the second set of Rapid Builds with the brick design was made as it was felt this was a more appealing design . That the "bricks" were in fact cladding, was not widely known by residents and shows the interplay between symbolism and materiality in mediating stigma. The grey cladding looked, in contrast to the brick design, *like* cladding and attracted negative commentary from residents, who identified the Ballymun development as looking "more like homeless houses". Here, meanings are shaped not just through the intertextuality of Rapid Build housing with other housing across history, but through comparisons between the two, differently clad, Rapid Build sites.

In previous research on a modular-clad development for homelessness families in South London, we found external cladding can induce fear and a sense of precarity for its residents (Harris et al 2019; Harris et al 2020). The architecture of the development

Figure 1. Exterior of the Ballymun Rapid Build development (Source: Katherine Brickell 2017).

Figure 2. Exterior of the Finglas Rapid Build development (Source: Katherine Brickell 2017).

acted as "a compounding form of stigmatization … a material point of anxiety" and a reminder for residents 'that they are the "kind of people" that horrific events such as the June 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London "happen to" (Harris et al 2019, 161). While the

Grenfell cladding was undertaken to make the tower less of a "blemish" for the wealthy neighbourhood surrounding it, cladding has increasingly come to be associated with blight, risk, and uncertainty in the tragedy's aftermath (Cooper and Whyte 2018). It has become symbolic of public housing becoming "wretchedly devalued, stigmatised, and the subject of scandalous maladministration" (MacLeod 2018, 460). Indeed, our first set of interviews with Finglas and Ballymun residents took place just four months after Grenfell, and DCC's Housing Policy, Research and Development team were quick to assure us that the Rapid Builds were of the highest fire safety standards. This indicates an understanding in the department of the acceleration of public anxiety regarding the safety and quality of cladded social housing.

Just as stigma describes "the degrading marks that are affixed to particular bodies, people, conditions and places" (Tyler 2020, 8), the nomenclature and external architecture of housing schemes are political acts of marking and meaning-making which hold considerable significance for resident well-being and sense of self. Spatial metaphors such as "sink estates" (Slater 2018) and ghettos (Pinkster, Ferier, and Hoekstra 2020), for example, act as "metomymic shorthand" for a "new class of problem people", "a revolting class discourse that was inscribed upon the bodies of those who lived in these abjectified zones" (Tyler 2013, 162). The label of "sink estates" conjured up by think thanks who are looking to control housing narratives, use the metaphor as a "semantic battering ram in the ideological assault on social housing, deflecting attention away from social housing not only as urgent necessity during a serious crisis of affordability, but as incubator of community, solidarity, shelter and home" (Slater 2018; Tyler and Slater 2018, 739).

Wacquant (2007) discusses, relatedly, how "territorial stigma" can arise as council estates are often peripherally located, high-rise, and perceived negatively by outsiders. The term "territorial stigmatisation" captures processes that purposefully deploy rhetoric intertwining poor quality or mismanaged social housing with assumptions regarding their residents as amoral and abject (Wacquant 2007). Territorial stigmatization establishes physical and social constructions of poverty and marginalization as innately spatial, whilst simultaneously obfuscating structural and systemic causes (Sisson 2020). These dual functions at once legitimize the denigration of people based on the location and materiality of their housing, and encourage social housing residents themselves to internalize negative constructions of their homes and neighbourhoods. Such external processes of devaluation are linguistic and ideological elements of what Imogen Tyler (2020, 239) calls "stigma power" which is wielded to impress stigma upon people. In the context of social housing, territorial stigmatization has largely been harnessed to erode social housing and further embed the private sector in all areas of housing policy. This has been established through strategies such as the introduction of public private partnerships (PPPs) and increasing reliance on sourcing social housing from the private sector from the 1990s onwards (Hearne and Murphy 2018).

An important means of expanding the concept of territorial stigmatization is to take into more balanced account the materiality and aesthetics of housing, as well as location. "Housing stigmatization remains comparatively underscrutinized" (Horgan 2020, 8) and the majority of "current research on territorial stigma does not differentiate between stigma that is applied to neighborhoods, types of housing, and types of tenure" (Smets and Kusenbach 2020, 3). It is not the case, for example, that housing stigmatization always arises in (dominant) relation to territorial stigmatization (Horgan 2020, 11). As our research

shows, the production of stigma is intertextual, and relates to how particular housing is discursively positioned within broader systems of meaning. In his research with residents of the Aylesbury estate in London, Paul Watt diagnoses Wacquant's (and subsequent academic) focus on territorial stigmatization as an 'analytical over-emphasis (Watt 2020, 31), that in fact "poor housing – in the form of heating breakdowns, leaks, infestation, inadequate repairs and maintenance – caused major distress and frustration and was a more important facet of their everyday lives than territorial stigmatisation" which they "largely disregarded, rejected, or actively dismissed" (20).

Dovetailing with the objectives of this paper, Watt (2020) advocates for the voices of social housing estate residents to be elevated in academic work and the materiality of housing "foregrounded, rather than neglected, in the analysis of the dynamics of urban advanced marginality". We further this endeavour by considering how stigma power is experienced and how "impressions affect the ways in which people perceive themselves and others" (Tyler 2020, 239). That residents are understood in housing literature not as "passive recipients but agents who actively re-appropriate the stigma that is imposed on them" (Cuny 2019, 890) is important to the emphasis of our own paper on residents' experiences of exiting homelessness into Rapid Build housing. In this sense, "stigma power" is not solely a top-down process. Drawing on Goffman (1963), Whelan (2021) discusses the importance, for example, of "impression management" amongst welfare recipients interviewed in Ireland. While he acknowledges that a "more structural understanding of the role and function of stigma" (p.47) has come to typify most recent scholarly works, the continuing significance of performativity in mitigating "spoiled identity" is something his research findings underscore.

Our research shows it is critical to highlight that the grafting and repelling of stigma also works through the naming and architectural practices of those commissioning and designing social housing. Work on place-based stigma speaks to long-running processes of defamation, infamy, and condemnation which social housing attracts (Leaney 2020; Shildrick 2018; Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira 2014; van de Wetering 2017). Listening to, and proactively considering residents' opinions and priorities in this context is paramount. Yet, the voices of social housing residents are usually absent from debates regarding their liveability (Hicks and Lewis 2020; Tunstall 2020). Research on territorial stigma still tends to focus on external rather than internal perceptions of "symbolic esteem" attributed to specific areas or neighbourhoods (Otero et al 2022, 633). This paper specifically contributes to improving knowledge of residents' views, aesthetic judgements, and embodied experiences of dwelling in social housing. Concurrent with Horgan (2020) its meaning-oriented approach shows the importance of "discussing housing and stigmatization simultaneously" by "exploring intersections between material reality and the symbolic realm of signification".

While we call for greater sensitivity and receptivity to resident-informed design, we do not position this as a "silver bullet" to address the root causes of stigma experienced by homeless families in Irish society. As recent research in Limerick (Ireland's third largest city) underscores, it is all too common for policymakers to intervene in deprived urban communities by fixating "on 'undoing' their internal physical and social composition, and 'improving' residents, rather than viewing the conditions in the estates as symptoms of a much more deep-rooted structural malaise" (Power at al 2021, 260). Yet while the (re-) production of stigma is inherently structural (Tyler 2020), to discount linguistics and

aesthetics as purely "compositional" or immaterial is counter-productive. Our research shows how they are also part of the machinery of stigma and warrant closer examination.

Researching the "Rapid Build" Housing Scheme in Dublin

The remainder of the paper reports on findings from qualitative research conducted in 2017–19 on the first two Rapid Build housing developments completed by DCC in Ballymun and Finglas. Due to similar work we undertook in London, we were invited by DCC to evaluate resident experiences of these schemes in order to assess successes and drawbacks that could be considered in future scheme iterations. Research methods consisted of in-depth interviews with 21 households (8 in Ballymun, 13 in Finglas), and subsequent focus group discussions with residents and key stakeholders about research findings (see Table 1). Ballymun residents had been living in their houses for 18 months, and Finglas residents for 3–6 months. The stakeholder focus group included DCC architects and officials involved in the design and development of the Rapid Builds, as well as those working in homelessness and related services. Follow-up research was undertaken in 2019. This consisted of a further 12 interviews with Rapid Build residents across both original schemes and a third, more recent, development in Ballyfermot, including three follow-up interviews with previous participants.

All the Ballymun households had previously been living in homeless emergency accommodation (either hotels, B&Bs or hostels). In Finglas, 29 of the total 39 households had been living in emergency accommodation, and 10 were allocated from the DCC housing wait list. The majority (19 out of 30) of those interviewed were women heading a single parent household. Of these, the majority had 1–3 children; 3 single adult households had more than three children. All households included children under 18 years old.

The majority of respondents (20 households) were Irish nationals. The remaining participants had emigrated to Ireland from a range of, predominately African, countries. The majority of households had been moved around different emergency accommodation between one and four times. However, for one household this had been between 10 and 14 times, and another two households had moved to different emergency accommodation more than 20 times during their period of homelessness.

The range of participant experiences, in terms of their journeys into homelessness, life in emergency accommodation, and transition to permanent tenancies, highlights the importance of understanding homelessness as an ongoing process, the impacts of which do not cease once the period of homelessness has ended. Some participants in the first research phase were interviewed 18 months after they had moved into the Rapid Builds, whilst others had been in their new homes for just a few months. Resident responses therefore represent a snapshot of time. And, as Chamberlain and Johnson (2018, 1258) note "it can take people many years to come to terms with having had a stigmatized identity, and some people monitor information about their past long after they have been rehoused". This paper therefore forms part of a longer-term project tracing life in Rapid Build housing, and the long-term implications of homelessness. What these snapshots do provide are insights into the myriad ways in which people internalize and make sense of their experiences of homelessness, and how the psychological impacts of stigma are not erased once a permanent tenancy has been signed.

Table 1. Overview of resident demographics.

Pseudonym	Scheme	Gender	Ethnicity/nationality	Previously homeless?	Single parent household?	Interviewed in first or second research period?
Chloe	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Maggie	Finglas	F	White Irish national	N	Y	1st and 2nd (return interview)
Anna	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Aoife	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Amy	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st and 2nd (return interview)
Patience	Finglas	F	Black African, non-Irish national	N	Y	1st
Grace	Finglas	F	Black African, non-Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Ciara	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Aisling	Finglas	F	White Irish national	N	Y	1st and 2nd (return interview)
Kate	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Charlie & Sally	Finglas	F & M	White Irish nationals	Y	N	1st
Mary	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Laura	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	2nd
Maja	Finglas	F	White Eastern European, non-Irish national	Y	Y	2nd
John & Sarah	Finglas	F & M	White Irish nationals	N	N	2nd
Roisin	Finglas	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	2nd
Orla & Cian	Finglas	F & M	White Irish nationals	N	N	2nd
Kayleigh & Sean	Finglas	F & M	White Irish nationals	N	N	2nd
Fiona & Michael	Finglas	F & M	White Irish nationals	N	N	2nd
Siobhan	Ballymun	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Shane	Ballymun	M	White Irish national	Y	N	1st
5	Ballymun	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Augusta	Ballymun	F	Black African, non-Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Chioma & Azi	Ballymun	F & M	Black African, non-Irish nationals	Y	N	1st
Abshir & Aisha	Ballymun	F & M	Black African and Arabic, non-Irish nationals	Y	N	1st
Viktor & Katarina	Ballymun	F & M	White Eastern European, non-Irish nationals	Y	N	1st
Imogen	Ballymun	F	White Irish national	Y	Y	1st
Deidre & Liam	Ballymun	F & M	White Irish nationals	Y	N	2nd
Hannah & Stephen	Ballymun	F & M	White Irish nationals	Y	N	2nd
Ifeoma	Ballyfermot	F	Black African, non-Irish nationals	Y	N	2nd
Zahra	Ballyfermot	F	Black African, non-Irish nationals	Y	Y	2nd

The Nomenclature of Stigma

For many once-homeless families now living in "Rapid Build" housing, the nomenclature "modular" had evoked imagery of emergency accommodation bearing no or little resemblance to traditional "bricks and mortar" housing. Some residents had concerns regarding their structural soundness and quality, with such fears often connected to historical

memories and tales of post-war 'prefab housing in Ireland. During this period, prefabs were forecast to last up to ten years (O'Neill et al. 2016) and became commonly badged as badly designed and cheap. In the midst of an acute homelessness crisis in Ireland, "Rapid Build" speaks to a similar logic as the post-war period, to use (now improved) prefabrication building technology to elevate shortages of housing at speed. According to interviews we conducted with DCC decision-makers, the scheme name was alighted on precisely because it did not denote the method used; but rather spoke to an urgent need they sought to fulfil for new social housing. Together however, the modular nature of the build and the scheme name associated with rapidity only conspired to worry residents.

The economic and materialist histories of prefab as temporary and poor quality coursed through the interviews, where residents explained their fears that the houses would not offer the long-term sustainability they craved. This finding redoubles the significance of stigma as a concept which is replete with "economic and materialist histories of bodily marking" and which aids "our understanding of the social, political and economic function of stigmatisation" (Tyler 2020, 15). Maggie from the Finglas development exclaimed,

> *"It is like really the Nissen huts coming up really from the 1920s, the pre-war things, you're kind of going, 'Oh God, this isn't going to be good' . . . you know, cardboard homes."*

Nissen huts were prefabricated, tunnel-shaped steel buildings placed on a concrete base, originally used to house troops in World War I. They took hours to construct, and many were repurposed as temporary housing after World War II. Other residents had imagined being moved into other structures which also harked back to the past,

> *"You hear about them coming in flat packs so again you think they're going to be prefabby . . . you know what I mean."* (Mary)

> *"First time they were telling me it's a modular house . . . .I thought about something* [like a] *container. Or, you know something like a mobile house, removable."* (Abshir)

> *"It was all over the news that these were going to be modular for the homeless and all that, when you say to somebody 'a modular house', you expect a portacabin nearly."* (Amy)

These interview excerpts speak to widely felt anxiety, fed by housing imaginations forged through the past, of structures built off-site which bore more resemblance to prefabs, containers, and portacabins, than traditional housing associated with longevity and permanence. Negative discourse surrounding the term prefab specifically was also acknowledged by policymakers. As a former policy adviser to the government noted:

> *"Initially there was a lot of resistance because the word prefab was in the offing and we knew it was going to be a very politically problematic issue . . . we would have been very concerned about the narrative around prefabs. The word prefab has connotations . . . you know, poor quality, cold, drafty accommodation. I think it'll always been seen as second rate."*

For many residents, the term "modular" also evoked imagery of emergency accommodation bearing no or little resemblance to traditional "bricks and mortar" housing. This raised concerns regarding the quality of the Rapid Builds, highlighting the importance of housing terminology and aesthetics in the reproduction of social stigma. For residents, this centred on the idea that housing developments that are both termed and look

"modular" (in that they are made from non-conventional housebuilding materials) stand out as housing for social tenants and the homeless, thus marginalizing them.

Two former government policy advisers acknowledged this problematic relationship between modular housebuilding methods and social stigma:

> *"In the context of social housing, as you know there's always a perception that the quality of what's being built for poorer people is not all that it might be elsewhere, and the history of prefabricated building in terms of tower blocks, here and in the UK leads to this thing that, you know, all this new-fangled stuff doesn't end well for the residents."*

> *"There's a stigma associated with social housing and there's a further stigma that's associated with homelessness, and when you do something different in terms of how you build . . . unfortunately it just added to the stigmatisation that was already there. Completely unjustified in terms of the building technology, but because you're doing something different, it just adds again to the level of stigmatisation, and that's very hard to overcome."*

As these excerpts reveal, the tainted reputation of prefabricated building methods was a frustration given advances in technology. Yet this blemishing runs far deeper than technology. Some existing locals to both sites worried, for example, about the introduction of the nearby modular housing because of who would move into them; stigmatizing prospective families before their arrival. A housing supply manager who had been involved in developing the Ballymun Rapid Builds commented that:

> *"From day one there was protests on the site . . . protesters who objected to what they seen as prefab houses, they wanted bricks and mortar . . . There was also a protest from local residents again because the perception was we were building pre-fabs and putting homeless people into them."*

This highlights that "modular" as a term evokes connotations of poorly-built housing, and connects to stigma around homelessness and social housing tenants: that the architecture of the Ballymun houses would reflect potentially troublesome residents housed within them. Such experiences reflect what Norris, Byrne, and Carnegie (2019) found in their Dublin-based research, that easily identifiable tenures "impeded interaction between residents" and "had a powerfully symbolic segregational effect". Ballymun residents themselves also expressed concern regarding their modular houses. Viktor and Katarina worried their children felt afraid and singled out for living in housing that looked too different:

> *"You know, from outside you can see probably . . . when you compare to other private houses, you know, they look different. And you know, in the kids view as well . . . now when they heard, you know, modular homes I don't know what's going on in their minds . . . they're afraid . . . hearing that . . . it doesn't make them feel good, you know, it would make them feel different from other kids"*

For Viktor and Katarina, these feelings also arose from deeply held fears about racism and xenophobia on account of being migrants, and having encountered kids in the area writing racist abuse on local walls. They were also concerned that Ballymun "didn't have a very good, you know, history from the past". Studies have identified Ballymun as having suffered from acute stigma given the former estate, associations made with anti-social behaviour, and its eventual demolition (Norris, Byrne, and Carnegie 2019). "Stigma power" is thus multiply rooted and timed, and works to set apart and link individuals and families to previously established undesirable and

devalued characteristics (Link and Phelan 2001). For Viktor and Katarina, housing that was labelled "Rapid Build" and "modular" was another exercise in classificatory power that worked against their family's best interests. These concerns were combined with the territorial stigmatization they identified of Ballymun, and the discrimination they faced as a migrant family. Their experiences underscore the necessity to understand and tackle stigma as a multi-dimensionally lived, historicized, and structural phenomenon which is marked through and on social housing.

"Bricks and Mortar"

As the previous section demonstrates, the use of prefabrication had initially worried the soon-to-be-residents. For example, Anna felt the container-like shapes and lack of brickwork often associated with modular housing draws attention to the fact their residents are social tenants. This angered Anna who felt it furthered the marginalization of social tenants, and particularly formerly homeless people, framing them as "other", separate from mainstream housing and, by proxy, mainstream society. Such housing, she argued, acts as a means of putting the poor "in their place", a constant reminder of their difference:

> *"The way they kind of put things like that together for social housing, it makes you feel that, 'Oh well you're not private, so we're letting you know that yous are in social housing, these are not yours' . . . We have stigmas all through our lives anyway, so why put it on your house?"*

Here Anna underlines the long-term burdens of stigma which homeless families typically carry and the potential of architecture to exacerbate it through design choices. The desire of residents to differentiate their homes from socially, culturally and politically loaded "modular" terminology was also reflected in the importance of traditional "bricks and mortar" aesthetics. The negative reaction residents showed towards the "Rapid Build" and "modular" nomenclature stood in contrast to the affirmation the brick external finish received. This was particularly pronounced in Finglas where the houses did not have the grey upper board of the Ballymun builds (Figures 1 and 2). Finglas residents felt their houses looked "normal", "ordinary" and explained that,

> *"These look like normal houses, they just look like a new estate . . . when people said they were built for the homeless, at least with these, people don't even know what these houses are for, they just think it's a new housing estate."* (Kate)

> "[I was worried] *people would be like 'Ah, they're houses for the homeless'. But I've never heard it about mine . . . they look like a real house . . . My neighbour was like 'Don't tell anybody'* [they're for homeless people] [Laughs]" (Chloe)

> *"If them houses* [in Ballymun] *were built like ours they wouldn't stand out as homeless houses, they'd look like ordinary houses . . . I wouldn't even call my house a Rapid Build or a modular . . . you don't want to be branded as the homeless people*" (Aisling)

Stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and which can lead people to "conceal" such attributes (Goffman 1990, 13). The interviews spoke to the brick appearance as allowing participants to feel they could newly "pass as normal" (Goffman 1963), with Chloe's neighbour directly joking about their recent histories of homelessness being hidden by their new housing. This jest is revealing, suggesting a deeper-seated sense of

masquerading or pretence that residents were still grappling with. It was of upmost importance to them that their housing circumstances no longer marked them out as different. As Aisling remarked, *"I wouldn't even call my house a Rapid Build or modular"*, thus distancing herself from its labelling. The bricks and mortar aesthetic aided a kind of "design blindness" of external architectural appearance to reduce the visual distinction between tenures (Bijen and Piracha 2017: 156). Having a home with a "bricks and mortar" aesthetic for Finglas residents[2] formed an unexpected part of the process of moving on from the trauma of homelessness. Being able to live in housing that does not immediately demarcate them to others as previously homeless was integral in constructing a secure and positive sense of home after, in many cases, years of stigma, shame and social marginalization.

Finglas residents saw their houses as of superior finish and quality to the Ballymun development on account of their "bricks and mortar" appearance. This brought about a new tension in our data set and reading of "stigma power". The Ballymun Rapid Builds were described by one Finglas resident as looking like they *"were built for the homeless"*, and as Aisling insinuated "*you don't want to be branded as the homeless people*". At times, Finglas residents therefore "othered" residents' homes in Ballymun, symbolically distinguishing themselves as having moved on in their journey from homelessness by comparison. Chloe explained more,

> *"Well, have you seen other builds? . . . you've obviously seen the Ballymun modular houses? . . . They don't look like these . . . like I think you'd just think it's a proper house . . . where the other ones you're like 'Ah, they're them Rapid Build houses', do you know what I mean? You come by these and you're like 'Ah, this is a lovely estate, they're lovely houses.' People are normally like 'You know those Rapid Builds in Ballymun', but I've never heard people saying that around here. My friend came up here with me, she was like 'Oh my God, these are massive. It's a lovely little estate', and all. Like where they put them, it doesn't look like it's out of place. It's in a nice location. They're done nice."*

As Belcher and DeForge (2012, 932) write, "Stereotyping and prejudice are often used to enhance the self-esteem of the person doing the stigmatizing, particularly when making downward comparison, which devalues groups". Kusenbach (2009) found too that in stigmatized Floridian "trailer" communities, residents "developed ways of salvaging their decency" by engaging in discursive "othering" through nuanced differences to distinguish themselves from fellow mobile home dwellers who "better fit" mainstream stereotypes of deviancy (see also Kusenbach 2020). In this vein, many of the Finglas interviewees used the aesthetic and locational differences of their homes to mark out their new-found esteem and place in Irish society in comparison to those in Ballymun. As two further Finglas residents noted of their homes,

> *"It's the brick thing . . . If you could get that brick and stick it onto the Ballymun houses . . . if you could just put another sheet of bricks and just see the difference it makes."* (Maggie)

> *"I think they* [Finglas Rapid Builds] *don't stand out as council housing . . . the brickwork on the front makes them compete with other purchased houses."* (Mary)

Interviews with Finglas residents consistently revealed an overriding desire for their homes to "fit in", with brick a key means of achieving this. Typically unaware of its

application *as cladding*, the brick was identified by Finglas residents as having positive associations with tradition, endurance, and constancy. The anti-stigmatizing effects of the brick however, were harnessed as a means to distance their homes, and in turn themselves, from the Ballymun scheme and residents, who they themselves stigmatized. As Shildrick (2018) poignantly explains, "Such is the power of stigma and shame that are now closely associated with poverty that even those experiencing deep poverty tend to disassociate themselves from the condition". The brick was for Finglas residents a symbolic and material mediating device to dissociate themselves from their prior homelessness and as Mary put it "*compete with other purchased houses*". While Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira (2014, 1270) emphasize the "role of symbolic structures in the production of inequality" and territorial stigmatization, residents' viewpoints provided here exalt the often overlooked symbolic importance of the external materiality and appearance of housing. While they held permanent tenancies, to residents the housing looked no different to privately owned homes, and afforded a far higher degree of emotional and tenure security than previous (private) rentals. This highlights how stigma is multiply rooted in a triad of territorial, symbolic, and tenure stigma that Mary and Maggie felt their Finglas brick-clad modular housing had ascended from in comparison to Ballymun.

In other words, the differentiation of exterior appearance, and the normativity of the brick, was used as a form of "stigma power" against those living in housing which deviated from a traditional brick appearance. Bricks were drawn upon as a material means to jettison the stigma of homelessness once residents were rehoused in the Rapid Builds. But their very absence was also used against the Ballymun development to signal the partiality of their transition from being "branded" homeless. The brick in our research thereby tells complex stories about stigma and its divisive power of demarcation. As Hicks and Lewis note, "a certain pride in a . . . scheme or home does not discount stigma, but rather takes it up and reworks it" (2020, 1382). As such the de-stigmatizing effects of bricks for Finglas residents are in some sense marred by their very normativity, and inability to challenge normative understandings of what "home" should look like. Brick cladding is compensatory, it does not challenge the stigma machine surrounding homelessness, yet it did offer some alleviation, or reprieve of its burden, for Finglas residents.

Conclusion

In 2019, we returned to Dublin to conduct follow-up interviews, both with previous participants, and residents of a new Rapid Build scheme in Ballyfermot. We found both the term "Rapid Build", and knowledge of the scheme's modular construction methods, was far less widespread among newer residents. Some had vague memories of press coverage concerning prefabs in Ballymun, but for most their homes were just "normal" new-build houses. A combination of deliberate decision-making by DCC to move away from publicly framing Rapid Builds as non-traditional in their construction, the perhaps inevitable loss of media interest over time, and the brick aesthetic of the scheme's newest iterations enabled them to become embedded, and ubiquitous. Whilst this represents a hopeful re-positioning of Rapid Builds and their residents, as "normal" and no longer directly associated with the stigma of homelessness, this shift in narrative simultaneously highlights the narrow confines of what are conceived as "appropriate" homes (and appropriate residents). Rather than providing a clear

path forward in terms of the construction and design of social housing, the Rapid Builds reveal that for many, the only perceived means of escaping stigma is to become discursively aligned with the very aspects of semiotic systems that (re)produce such stigmatizations. As Hicks and Lewis (2020) note, stigmatized groups are not devoid of agency, but rather are key actors in both the embedding of, and resistance to, the production of stigma. Our research has highlighted how routes to escaping the stigma attached to social housing can compound the ideological position that private home ownership is the marker of success. This draws attention to the need to move beyond narratives of "stigmatisers versus stigmatised" and instead examine the polyvocal discourses and practices through which both hegemonic and marginalized groups are complicit in stigma's reproduction through intertextual, semiotic systems

However, we nonetheless argue that the transition of Rapid Builds, from suspicious prefabs to "normal" housing, is a notable lesson for architects, policymakers and housing scholars. Clearly, how the terminology and aesthetics of social housing are approached is an important (yet admittedly insufficient) move in dismantling the othering encountered by the families we met. Furthermore, the experiences of Rapid Build residents reflect the importance of understanding the relationship between social housing construction and stigma power in two interrelated ways.

First, the paper has shown how the nomenclature and materiality of housing has a profound effect on both how its residents are constructed in the social imaginary, and how residents understand themselves in relation to this. Semantic and materialist histories of prefabrication and its poor quality have not been erased by advances in technology and quality, but rather continue to shape peoples' imaginations and initial encounters with contemporary "modular" housing. Stigma is highly symbolic and marked through and on buildings and bodies over time and space.

Second, whilst decision-making regarding housing terminology and design do not in and of themselves provide a remedy in addressing the root causes of class-based stigmatization, engaging with social tenants' perceptions and experiences of their housing is integral in better understanding, and resisting, the role of architecture in the "stigma machine". Rarely are social housing residents consulted on their aesthetic views (Tunstall 2020), a neglect which we have looked to counter. Resident-centred design rooted in democratic architectural processes would provide important steps in ensuring the needs and opinions of buildings' future residents are made central. As this paper has shown, housing stigmas cannot be understood without close attention to the interplay between the material and the symbolic. Aesthetic and discursive elements of housing architectures can either compound existing stigmas or go some way to shifting perceptions. In sum, historical meanings attached to building materials and processes must be taken seriously, especially in the case of housing for groups, such as homeless people, already battling against stigmatizing discourses.

Notes

1. Residents across all the schemes were generally impressed with the interior quality of their homes (see Nowicki et al 2018).
2. The changing significance of the brick cladding and Rapid Build nomenclature for the newer Ballyfermot residents will be discussed later in the paper.

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