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Investigating care and housing provision across Europe

1. Research interest

Care and Housing are essential for human flourishing as they both deal with the provision of livelihoods, i.e. fulfilling the basic functions for human needs satisfaction: to be cared for and to care for oneself and the people around you are a prerequisite for physical and mental wellbeing, societal participation, and autonomy (Aulenbacher et al., 2014; Fraser, 2016; Gottschlich & Hackfort, 2022). Similarly, a place to call home is essential as a physical shelter from the outside world as well as the site for social reproduction (Federici, 1975; Novy et al., 2024). At the same time, how we dwell influences our possibilities to care for others and ourselves, while the care (work) we carry out in and around our homes defines our lived realities. In particular since the 1990s, there has been considerable institutional restructuring in both fields (Aalbers, 2017; Atzmüller et al., 2024; Aulenbacher, 2020; Clapham, 2019). Under the assumption that private, market-based modes and forms of care and housing are more efficient, less costly and of better quality, care and housing provision across Europe have been commodified, marketised, corporatised and financialised (Farris & Marchetti, 2017; Plank et al., 2023). This has aggravated structural problems of access and affordability and led to increasing socioeconomic and spatial polarisations as well as overlapping social inequalities. Working conditions as well as the quality of the services provided have significantly deteriorated in what is called a "care crisis" (Aulenbacher & Dammayr, 2014; Dowling, 2021). Simultaneously, there is an oversupply of expensive housing and severe lack of good-quality affordable dwellings, coupled with vacancies and rural flight across Europe (see Call for Papers to this special issue). At the same time, there have been efforts from civil society to prevent and/or reverse some of these trends by promoting community-oriented modes and forms of care and housing provision. The contested interplay of marketisation and communitisation results in the configuration of new provisioning forms – often in hybrid arrangements (cf. Baumgartner & Volmary, 2022; Fröhlich et al., 2024; Fröhlich, 2023). Both care and housing researchers analyse such initiatives referring to them as "caring communities" (Wegleitner & Schuchter, 2020; Zängl, 2023) or "collaborative housing" (Czischke, 2018; Lang et al. 2020).

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Against this backdrop, the research project has investigated the (re-)organisation of care and housing in three European countries: Austria, Hungary and the Netherlands. The three countries make for an interesting comparison due to their distinct welfare traditions: Austria, as a paradigmatic case of a conservative-corporatist welfare state (Matznetter, 2002; Leichsenring, 2017); Hungary as a country significantly shaped by the extensive privatisation following the transition from socialism (Stephens et al., 2015; Katona & Melegh, 2020); the Netherlands as a country that has a strong social-democratic heritage but has turned to neoliberal welfare politics since the 1990s, which includes the active promotion of community initiatives by the governments and stakeholders in both fields (Boterman & van Gent, 2023; Bruquetas-Callejo, 2019). The comparative approach aimed at finding differences and commonalities across the three countries and the two fields. This way key institutional differences enabling and/or restricting the marketisation and communitisation of care and housing provision, overarching shared tendencies as well as resulting intersectional inequalities were identified.

The data was based on research conducted within the DOC-team 114: "The Contested Provisioning of Care and Housing". The DOC-team was funded for three years (August 2021 – July 2024) by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW). The team consists of two PhD candidates from JKU Linz, Valentin Fröhlich and Florian Pimminger, and two PhD students from WU Wien, Benjamin Baumgartner and Hans Volmary. The project was supervised by Brigitte Aulenbacher (JKU) and Andreas Novy (WU). The DOC-team 114 was advised by Julie Froud, University of Manchester, Cornelia Klinger, University of Tübingen and Flavia Martinelli, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria. Hosting partners were Maarten van Ham, TU Delft as well as Tamás Bartus and Attila Melegh, Corvinus University Budapest.

2. Research approach

The project employed a shared theoretical perspective to analyse the contested re-organisation of care and housing provision, drawing on the works of Karl Polanyi (Polanyi, 1977, 2001; cf. Baumgartner et al., 2021). In Polanyi's substantivist interpretation, the economy is not about creating monetary value – measured most prominently as GDP. It is about providing the foundations of life and, thus, to ensure the functioning of our societies (cf. Spash, 2024). This means that instead of viewing "the economy" as homogenous, i.e. as "One Big Market" (Polanyi, 2001, 187), a substantivist perspective engages with economies (in the plural) and assumes that they occur in various shapes and forms (Fanning et al., 2020). Instead of essentialising market behaviour, a substantive view of the economy acknowledges that there is a plurality of socioeconomic principles underlying the provision of care and housing (Bärnthaler & Dengler, 2023; Baumgartner et al., 2021; Peck, 2013). Polanyi has identified four such organisational principles: market exchange,

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based on price mechanisms and underlying most capitalist market transactions; redistribution, requiring the presence of a central authority redistributing goods and services according to principles such as distributive justice; reciprocity, based on "institutional patterns of symmetry" (Polanyi 2001, 56) covering symmetrical social relations such as kinship or in communities; and householding, which "consists in production for one's own use" (ibid, 51) and is organised in self-sufficient units – often the household. All four socioeconomic principles play a role in the provision of care and housing. Often in hybrid combinations, they "establish the basis for the organization of (re)productive and (re)distributive capacities in different societies […]. In tandem (and really only in tandem), they govern the ways in which real economies work, as combinatory sites of multiple rationalities, interests, and values, rather than as spaces governed by singular and invariant economic laws." (Peck, 2013, 1555). Their concrete and often conflicted interplay remains an empirical question, warranting fine-grained institutional analysis.

Furthermore, we reflected on the simultaneous marketisation and communitisation in the fields of care and housing in terms of a Polanyian "double movement" – the "movement" of care and housing's marketisation and a "countermovement" seeking protection from market-driven dynamics – acknowledging that there are further motives shaping both tendencies and their contestation (Abraham & Aulenbacher, 2019; Bärnthaler et al., 2023). More concretely, we interpreted Polanyi's double movement as the contested re-organisation of socioeconomic principles (cf. Berndt et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2018), a process the project aimed to shed light on. We have made field-specific adaptations to the shared Polanyian framework, which we will not delve into for the purpose of this report (but see Baumgartner & Volmary, 2022, 2024; Fröhlich et al., 2024; Fröhlich, 2023).

The research design of the project has consisted of two stages. First, the care regimes and housing systems were investigated in all three countries. This happened through intensive desk research, i.e. document analysis of directives, reports, regulations and websites, as well as secondary data analysis of Eurostat and national databases. Expert interviews with key local actors, politicians, civil society organisations, etc. were conducted to substantiate the findings. In a second step, case studies of specific arrangements of care and housing in the three countries were carried out. On the one hand, these were marketised forms of care and housing, namely live-in care agencies and purpose-built student accommodations. On the other hand, more community-oriented initiatives and arrangements, specifically caring communities and collaborative housing initiatives. Interviews with involved actors were carried out to find out their strategies and practices, identify underlying socioeconomic principles, as well as relevant policies. Finally, we have been conducting field-specific syntheses based on the regime analyses and case studies. The results are triangulated between fields and countries in order to identify important differences and commonalities and explain reasons for underlying shared

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tendencies, the socio-political embedding of the cases, their motivations, challenges, and visions.

For this purpose, from February to July 2023, we have spent three months at the project's partner institutions in Hungary and Netherlands. In Hungary, we were associated with Attila Melegh and Tamás Bartus at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences at Corvinus University; in the Netherlands we spent three months at the Technical University of Delft with Maarten van Ham at the Department for Urbanism. Next to carrying out the actual field work, the research stays familiarised us with the culture and politics of the countries we were studying. They also served as an opportunity for networking with researchers from the countries we are studying, which proved to be a very valuable resource during the research process.

3. Preliminary findings

We are in the process of consolidating and publishing our findings but there are some preliminary insights to be shared at this stage: The shared conservative welfare tradition in Austria and Hungary manifests differently in their respective care and housing regimes, while overarching similarities remain. The historical compromise with social democracy has resulted in a significant social rental housing stock in larger Austrian cities, while the experience of socialism and subsequent rapid privatisation has led to a "super homeownership" society in Hungary. In Austria, restrictive mortgage lending intersects with conservative, familialistic elderly care policies, alongside growing marketised care arrangements, in particular live-in care. Mortgage lending in Hungary features strong familialistic traits, offering monetary incentives to families with more children. Market-based care remains marginal. Similarly to Austria, the legacy of social democracy in the Netherlands has led to significant social rental housing stocks in Dutch cities. In contrast to the conservative welfare tradition, the Netherlands experienced a neoliberal transformation, exemplified, for example, by the highest mortgage-debt-to-GDP ratio in Europe. Marketised care is prominent, alongside community experimentation. The institutional configuration of the three countries enables or restricts community/market-based care and housing to varying degrees. Particularly, third-sector organizations like housing associations or larger welfare providers serve as reliable partners for novel collaborative initiatives in Austria and the Netherlands. In Hungary, an increased proportion of elderly care is organised by (Christian) religious organisations or churches.

To illustrate our case-study analysis, we focus on community initiatives, which have gained prominence in both fields (Baumgartner et al. 2024). The ways in which they reinforce the socioeconomic principle of reciprocity in their respective care and housing arrangements can reduce the influence of market forces. However, the reorganisation of socioeconomic principles, namely market exchange and reciprocity, is contested and does not follow a linear trajectory. Collaborative housing initiatives

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may aim to decommodify land and provide affordable housing, but a wide variety of arrangements exists in the private, more exclusive market. Market actors, such as housing developers and private care providers, are increasingly interested in integrating collaborative elements to enhance reciprocity among residents/users. Lastly, we observe a growing interest in the intersection of care and housing in the context of aging. Many community initiatives across all three countries aim to create better environments for a growing elderly population. Decreasing barriers and increasing opportunities for societal participation and autonomy emerge as important overlapping themes in our dataset.

4. Next steps and dissemination

Within the scope of the project, three academic events were organised: an international research workshop at Vienna University of Economics and Business (04th – 5th May 2022) titled "The Contested Provisioning of Care and Housing" brought together diverse perspectives from European and Austrian academics (The results were documented as an online debate, published on the website of the International Karl Polanyi Society); an international academic conference at Johannes Kepler University in Linz (04th – 6th December 2023) titled "Transformative Change in the Contested Fields of Care and Housing in Europe" reflected on the contemporary developments in care regimes and housing systems, aiming at a broad interdisciplinary dialogue of social sciences on these multidimensional changes; a third international conference happened at Vienna University of Economics and Business (23rd – 24th May, 2024) called "Imaginaries and Strategies for Good Care and Good Housing in Times of Transformation". It focused on how (collective) actors can explore new imaginaries as well as strategies to actualise visions of "good" care and housing. The conference featured a practitioners' workshop with the goal of fostering a dialogue between scholars and activists from the two fields.

Furthermore, drawing on the latest state of the art research, Brigitte Aulenbacher, Andreas Novy, Benjamin Baumgartner, Valentin Fröhlich and Hans Volmary applied for a guest editorship of a special issue of the renowned *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* entitled "Transformative Change: Care and Housing in Europe". Currently, they work on its estimated publication in 2025.

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