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A geography of repoliticisation: Popularising alternative housing models in Oslo

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ABSTRACT

The question of the political has gained renewed relevance in recent years. New movements are challenging what has been called 'the post-political consensus' and have facilitated the repoliticisation of a wide range of social, political and cultural phenomena—both on the left and the right. One task for geographers is to understand this repoliticisation spatially. The housing sector is a prime example of how such a repoliticisation occurs. With an emerging global urban housing affordability crisis, housing is becoming an important arena for engaging in emancipatory democratic politics. In this paper, we use Oslo as a case to analyse how housing, which has long been governed through liberal consensus, is being repoliticised. We investigate Oslo's agenda of establishing a 'third housing sector' beyond the privatised model, and its role in popularising alternative models in housing. We focus on the mobilisation and rearticulation of the genealogy of failure of housing in Oslo and the alternative housing solutions brought together in the city. Discussing the emerging geographical referencescape of housing as a distinctly spatial process of politicisation we show how arguments and positions gain legitimacy by situating references to other situations and places in a multiplicity of local and foreign arenas.

1. Introduction

The process of legitimising what has previously been perceived as illegitimate is at the heart of the political and represents continuous struggle over 'what is possible' (Mouffe, 2005, 2018; Swyngedouw, 2009; Swyngedouw & Ernstson, 2018). In recent years, reoccurring crises and the rise of populism have given new relevance to the question of the political. Movements from across the political spectrum are challenging the post-political consensus. This has facilitated the repoliticisation of a wide range of social, political and cultural phenomena. At the present juncture, it seems appropriate to question whether we are in a 'post-political condition', and to attune our research towards examining how alternatives might gain hold.

Housing can provide an appropriate case for understanding politicisation. Although housing conditions vary enormously over space and time, powerful culturally embedded assumptions exist regarding what is 'rational' in terms of housing size, location, and social and economic organisation. For example, the ideal of the detached suburban home became a strong cultural force in the post-war era (Fishman, 1987). In many countries private homeownership has become hegemonic and relatively uncontested (Aalbers & Christophers, 2014; Ronald, 2008). Market-based housing provision and reduced state involvement in housing has become the norm, following from national welfare state restructuring in the 1980s (Kadi, 2015).

However, in the wake of the global financial crisis, the financialisation of housing—its connection to processes of urbanisation—and the prospect of private homeownership as a form of asset-based welfare have received amplified attention (Aalbers, 2009, 2019; Christophers, 2011; Cook et al., 2013; Doling & Ronald, 2010). With an emerging global urban housing affordability crisis (Wetzstein, 2017; Wijburg, 2021) housing policy is increasingly being subject to contestation (Chen, 2011; Di Feliciantonio, 2017a, 2017b; Gray, 2018) and is becoming an important global arena for engaging in emancipatory democratic politics (García-Lamarca, 2017). In Oslo, the context of this paper, the politicisation of housing is taking place through particular global and local relations.

While the international mobilisation of housing models is not a new phenomenon, the unfolding of urban housing crises has seen an increase in the global flow of housing policy as cities try to navigate the complexity of the field (Murphy, 2014). Research highlights that private consultancies as well as voluntary sector actors influence national and urban housing agendas through international policy exchanges (Baker &

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McGuirk, 2019; Murphy, 2014).

Contrary to the image pertaining to the Scandinavian welfare model, Norway is often described as having one of the most liberalised housing markets in Europe.[1] While Norway holds a long history of homeownership, the deregulatory policies of the 1980's shifted homeownership from a regulated, low-profit venture to a personal economic investment with speculative potential; allowing it to become the financial asset it represents today (Sørvoll, 2011; Nethercote, 2019). Because deregulated housing policies have benefited a large portion of the Norwegian population overall (given that housing prices have been rising since the 1990s), the liberalisation of housing has been viewed favourably (Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019). The potential wealth gain associated with liberalising a regulated housing system may be viewed as a significant factor in depoliticising the housing question (Ryan-Collins et al., 2017).

Since the 1990s, compact city policies have also contributed to a particular role of housing in urban sustainability strategies (Kjærås, 2021). Critique associated with the rise in urban housing prices has been accompanied by a shift in the view of cities—as increasingly attractive in cultural, environmental and economic terms. This reality has meant that housing affordability has been sought through urban densification policies, allowing for more housing units to be built. However, as Ahlfeldt and Pietrostefani (2019) argue, densification may have 'regressive distributional consequences'. In Oslo, economic growth, population growth and increases in inequality have in fact concurred since the 1980s (Wessel, 2013). This context is significant for understanding the depoliticised housing climate that has taken hold in the last three decades, where critique of urban housing affordability has been side-lined by an ideological shift towards urban life.

However, this depoliticised situation is now changing in Oslo. Rising costs are putting homeownership beyond reach for increasing portions of the population, and the generalised consensus on homeownership through the housing market appears to be cracking. A broad range of actors, including formal political actors within the municipality, are struggling to expand conceptions of 'what is possible' in housing.

In this paper, we examine the mobilisation of housing alternatives related to a 'third housing sector' in Oslo—a regulated low- or non-profit housing sector aimed at providing solutions for housing affordability. Representing an alternative to market-based housing and direct public housing schemes, the third housing sector cohere a model for housing development, ownership and organisation through subsidisation, legislation, collaboration and regulation. While there are concrete models for a third housing sector elsewhere, the translation of such a sector to a Norwegian context gathers a broad range of actors and initiatives working to construct alternatives to the contemporary market-based model in Oslo. These actors are drawing on a range of everyday experiences, as well as examples and models from other cities, and are mobilising these to repoliticise the housing question. That said, this process of repoliticisation is not determined. The struggles over a third housing sector in Oslo remains precisely a struggle over legitimising solutions that challenge the inequalities produced through the housing system versus solutions that aim to include more people into the existing housing market.

This repoliticisation is distinctly *spatial*, in that mobilisation draws legitimacy by situating references to other situations and places in a multiplicity of local arenas. We argue that this emerging geographical "referencescape" (McCann, 2017, p. 1821) for housing in Oslo is critical to the gradual displacement and delegitimisation of hegemonic models, ideas and logics. Referencescape indicates the intertwined spatial and temporal political landscape that structures the 'world' in which an issue is understood.

The burgeoning literature on how ideas and politics are mobilised across space and scale contains lessons for understanding this repoliticisation spatially; for example in the work on policy mobility and related discussions (McCann & Ward, 2011, 2012; Peck & Theodore, 2015). While we build on key ideas from the policy mobilities research, we argue that the current challenge to the post-political condition requires that we shift focus towards the ongoing contestation of the hegemonic consensus. Drawing on theories of transformation that emphasise interstitial geographies (Katz, 1996; Wright, 2010) and counter-hegemonic relations (Hart, 2018; Massey, 2011) we aim to understand how the mobilisation of successes and failures, alternative ideas, models and practices are repositioning and displacing hegemonic ideas and practices of housing in Oslo.

To meet this aim, in this paper we first review the literature on the post-political condition, repoliticisation and policy mobility, outlining the gaps found within these fields and describe our approach to understanding the spatiality of the repoliticisation of housing in Oslo. Second, we describe the methods of the study. Third, we provide a context for the current situation and analyse the role of the third housing sector in politicising the question of housing in Oslo. Here we focus on the mobilisation and rearticulation of the genealogy of failure of housing in Oslo, and the alternative housing solutions brought together in the city. Discussing the emerging geographical referencescape as a distinctly spatial process of politicisation we show how arguments and positions gain legitimacy by situating references to other situations and places in a multiplicity of local and foreign arenas. Lastly, we provide concluding remarks on the role of the third housing sector in Oslo and the significance of understanding politicisation spatially.

2. Conceptualising the spatial politics of housing

2.1. Post-politics and the nature of repoliticisation

The concept of 'the post-political' has influenced understanding of political conditions following from the rise of global neoliberal urban governance arrangements and consensus-based politics since the end of the cold war (Beveridge, Hüesker, & Naumann, 2014; Beveridge & Koch, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2009). Through ideological, cultural and political reconfiguration of urban and economic governance arrangements across scales (Harvey, 1989), politics is arguably reduced to the administration and management of processes whose parameters are defined by mainstream consensus. According to a post-political perspective, this consensus represents a consensus in contradictions as political disagreement is replaced by its image within market logics. Value based perspectives, such as viewing the home as representative of e.g., 'stability' and 'equality in life', become distorted by their *possible* representations, leaving an undercurrent of ignored dissatisfaction (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2011; Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2009, 2011). As such, Swyngedouw (2017, p. 60) argues that the post-political condition does not dissolve the political but reorders the possibilities of the political, "with far-reaching consequences for the modalities of egalitarian and emancipatory urban change."

The recent conjuncture of crises and the rise of populist insurgencies now positions the question of 'the political' at the front and centre. Political ruptures that seemed nearly impossible only a few years ago are suddenly appearing in abundance in Europe, North America and beyond. The contemporary conjuncture appears to present opportunities for actors from across the political spectrum to re-appropriate political trajectories. Thus, the key question is whether something substantially new is emerging and if so, how?

Understanding politicisation processes remains difficult terrain. Swyngedouw (2017, p. 60), for example, argues that the political manifests itself in:

> enunciating demands that lie beyond the existing situation, demands that cannot be symbolised within the frame of reference of the

[1] Liberal in this context indicates housing system deregulation mechanisms where market-based solutions are favoured over state involvement and regulation, providing the conditions for a commodified housing system.

instituted order and, therefore, would necessitate a transformation in and of this order to permit symbolisation to occur.

Politicisation can as such been seen to invite consideration for processes that generate altered conditions for the organisation *and* the content of politics. Recent research has highlighted that such processes should not be viewed through binary state-society relations, but rather pay particular attention to the changing nature and roles of institutions, actors, coalitions and political terrains (Beveridge & Koch, 2021; Paccoud, 2019). Alternative political horizons may not work against the state but seek to alter its function and purpose towards different ends.

Looking at housing and architecture specifically, these have historically been fields with strong international knowledge circuits, in which a great breadth of ideas and intentions have circulated between localities (Cook et al., 2014; Glendinning, 2009; Guttu, 2011). Since the 1980s housing has, in many countries, been driven by a formal policy regime prioritising free-market policies and homeownership: a political-economic ideology with its own specific, yet uneven geography (Harvey, 2005). This broader shifts in housing politics can be viewed as cohering with post-political notions and where housing policy "has become too attentive to managerial interventions that prioritise demand side concerns rather than tackling more fundamental problems of supply" (Jacobs & Manzi, 2017: 18). In a recent contribution, Beveridge and Koch (2021) show how urban housing are becoming part of a new wave of politicisation where housing is viewed as a fundamental struggle of commoning urban resources. These struggles do not necessarily take place through formal political structures, but rather seek to rework the organisation of state-society relations through alternative organisational forms, alliances and state-repurposing.

This emerging scholarship is promising and provides relevant insight for understanding how repoliticisation takes place. We see these processes of politicisation as taking place in relational and interconnected ways, and as being made possible through networked and symbolic exchange with places, people and discourses elsewhere.

2.2. Policy mobility and repoliticisation

Ample work available within geography can help us understand the spatiality of repoliticisation. The rapidly growing policy mobility literature focuses on how political ideas and policies move between polities across spaces and scales, who and what moves them, and the translations they go through in the process (McCann & Ward, 2011). By stacking out theoretical and methodological approaches for researching placemaking in an increasingly mobile world, this literature has paid much-needed attention to "the connective tissue that constitutes cities as global-relational nodes" (McCann, 2011, p. 109) and to the wider sets of practices and roles that enables such relational production.

The relevance of this body of literature for understanding politicisation is particularly acute given its spatial orientation and its emphasis on urban comparative tactics and networked alliances. However, in understanding the spatiality of repoliticisation, the policy mobility literature has certain limitations. In the terms established above, the policy mobility literature has been more concerned with depoliticisation than with repoliticisation. For this reason, less focus has been given to understanding constituent processes of the political. In general, policy mobility studies have foregrounded formal elite actors and directed its gaze at discourses and processes put in motion by those actors who have resources to mobilise them. Priority has been given to "success stories" and the mutation, translation and mobility of largely neoliberal policy (Baker & McCann, 2018; Bunnell, 2015; Jacobs, 2012).

Peck and Theodore (2015) recognise that networked approaches have a danger of sampling formal and representative actors or falling into the routes carved out by for example policy makers. From this reasoning, policy mobilities studies may be said to be tending towards *presentism;* in other words, highlighting and therefore implicitly affirming hegemonic actors and their agendas, as well as "omnipresent structures" (Beveridge & Koch, 2017, p. 37). In a recent paper, Baker et al. (2020) challenge the focus on elite actors in policy mobilities research, highlighting non-elite actors such as street-level bureaucrats, activists, social service agencies and residents. Their contribution brings a broader group of actors into the research field without attributing them binary or oppositional roles.

The recent focus on *policy failure* within policy mobilities research (Baker & McCann, 2018; Chang, 2017; Longhurst & McCann, 2016; Wells, 2014) provides another promising research avenue for challenging the literature's emphasis on 'success stories' and presentism. McCann and Ward (2015) have previously noted how attention to the success/failure dualism in policymaking is important. Such a focus may be productive for approaching "action-in the-name-of-differentiation" (Jacobs, 2012, p. 419), and those things and actors which do not move or simply escape established methodological and theoretical frames (Bunnell, 2015; Harris & Moore, 2013; Jacobs, 2012; McFarlane, 2011).

In their study of supervised drug consumption sites in Melbourne, Baker and McCann (2018, p. 6) outline a "differentiation-focused" agenda for the study of policy mobility. They show that there are potential generative effects of policy failure as the frontiers and barriers of constrained policy provide spaces for discursive struggle, alliance building and endurance in a potentially changing policy regime. In a similar vein, Longhurst and McCann (2016) argue for the use of 'policy frontier' as a term to describe the space that develops when policies meet political and institutional contestation, stating that policy frontiers entail "a 'fuzzy geographic space' where outcomes are not predetermined and where policy change may occur, even if slowly, incrementally, or cautiously" (Longhurst & McCann, 2016, p. 119). This work on policy failure is instructive in that it recognises the coeval and open-ended process of policymaking.

Overall, the policy mobilities literature's focus on the geographical *translation* of struggles, ideas and models from elsewhere and their subjectification to a vast network of actors with diverging intentions and capacities (McFarlane, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2015) provides a significant approach for understanding the referencescapes that are assembled. Acts of translation can be understood as political processes whereby particular referencescapes are co-constructed – being part of forging the 'world' in which an issue is understood (McCann, 2017).

2.3. The spatiality of repoliticisation

Building on McCann's notion of "referencescape" and critical insight from within scholarship on post-politics and policy mobility, we would like to further advance an approach that is sensitive to the spatiality of politicisation by drawing on conceptual interventions on counter-hegemonic and interstitial geographies (Hart, 2018; Katz, 1996; Massey, 2011; Robinson, 2016; Wright, 2010). These literatures have in common that they approach difference/alterity as partially already existing, yet largely immobile, ignored, discarded or ascribed to the logic of hegemonic narratives. From this perspective politicisation entails processes of making alterity move, become associated and related to other ignored situations elsewhere (Hart, 2018; Katz, 2001). Robinson (2016) understands these relational processes of differentiation as both genetic and generative as they provide an opportunity for shaping understanding of the *genealogy of an outcome* (e.g., housing failure) and of *generative processes* from which the symbolisation of a differentiated reality can take place.

An example can be found in Massey's (2011, p. 12) study of counterhegemonic relationality where difference is produced through the "ongoing trajectories of mutual modification" between Caracas and London. Massey's case study portrays the production of difference as taking place through coeval geographical processes, resisting the commonplace inclination to essentialise difference as local and unique. It is this precise insight that matters to understanding politicisation as these processes are conceptualised as distinctly spatial.

Temenos (2017) furthers this agenda through the concept of

counter-mobilities to better understand "the resistances, disruptions and alternative pathways used in activism for policy reform by people in disparate locations" (p. 585). Bringing together post-political theory and policy mobilities studies, Temenos conceptualises politicisation as multiple, small and everyday proper political acts. Temenos' study highlights how politicisation can be understood as *interstitial* processes, where relatively minor ruptures emerge from a variety of places to transgress the hegemonic (Katz, 1996; Wright, 2010).

Writing on austerity, Featherstone (2021) is similarly interested in understanding the plethora of contested spatial practices of politicisation, challenging the focus on temporal ruptures within the post-political literature. Describing the uneven geographies of the Scottish left(s) in contesting austerity politics, Featherstone's spatially attuned approach allows for better conceptualisation of political agency. As will be evident with the case of the third housing sector, interstitial processes do not establish complete alternatives, but pushes the limits of the hegemonic, to provoke "a line of escape", and generate tensions "out of which something else might happen" (Katz, 1996, p. 489).

This spatially tuned conceptualisation of change is arguably more dynamic and open to change than more structural perspectives because it stresses the potentiality of ruptures residing within. It highlights that not only are the hegemonic ideas mobile, so too are the 'minor' ideas—but as fragments, not as totalities. Understanding the repolitisation of housing in Oslo requires not only a perspective that looks beyond formal networks, elite circuits and conferences, but also at the contextualisation and mobilisation of ideas and practices that may cause ruptures and provide lines of escape.

In the following we use these conceptual interventions to understand repoliticisation in the Oslo housing sector. We focus on how particular failures and successes are rearticulated and how references to ideas and models from elsewhere can perform politically. Under the agenda of promoting a third housing sector, actors mobilise a set of experiences and references that work interstitially to repoliticise questions of how housing should be built, organised and owned, and by whom.

3. Methods

The research presented in this paper was carried out as part of a larger research project pertaining to the politics of housing and compact city policies in Oslo. Multi-sited fieldwork was carried out in Oslo, London, Malmö, Copenhagen and Berlin in the period from 2017 to 2019. For this paper 27 interviews with politicians, architects, city employees, activists, developers, private and public actors, and other initiators have been analysed. From this material, architects were found to be a group of actors particularly involved in challenging housing solutions in Oslo, having a brokering role between different urban actors. The informants were either directly involved in urban development or housing politics in Oslo or experts in the field. In analysing these interviews particular attention was placed on how actors framed the issue of housing and urban development, their understanding of a third housing sector, the references they brought into the conversation from other contexts and cities and their subject position.

A selection of 176 newspaper articles (discussing: the housing crisis in Oslo, the role of the third housing sector, and references to other European cities) was collected through two searches 'tredje boligsektor' and 'boligpolitikk and (Zurich or Amsterdam or København or Europa or Wien or London or England or Danmark or Berlin)' in central Norwegian newspapers and magazines (Aftenposten, Arkitetur N, Dag og Tid, Dagbladet, Dagsavisen, Kapital, Klassekampen, Morgenbladet, VG, Vårt Land) in the time period January 01, 2012–November 10, 2020. These articles were used to supplement the data gathered through interviews and was alongside notes from 25 public meetings and conferences, 3 exhibitions and one study trip used to triangulate findings. The Statistics Norway (2020a) data set '07230: Price for existing dwellings, by type of building and region (2015 = 100) 1992–2020' have been used. All interview and newspaper quotes have been translated by the authors from Norwegian.

4. Depoliticising and repoliticising housing in Oslo: the case of the third housing sector

Before deregulation during the 1980s, the Norwegian housing system was tightly regulated, with supply-side subsidies, direct state involvement and securitisation, and price regulation mechanisms in parts of the sector (Oust, 2018; Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019; Turner & Wessel, 2019). With the move from a regulated housing system to a market-based housing scheme by the 1990s, the idea of "well--functioning housing markets" (Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019, p. 6) has been the norm. The rental market has de facto no price regulation as homeownership is the national strategy for all, also low-income households (Nordahl, 2014). Four per cent of households in Norway are public sector housing (Statistics Norway, 2020c, 2020d).

In Oslo, 69 per cent of households own their place of residency, while the national average is 77 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2020b). These numbers have been rather stable since the 1990s, suggesting that the last three decades of liberalised housing policies have not significantly increased homeownership (Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019). In fact, since the 1980s, low-income homeownership has been in decline (Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019).

As a fast-growing city in a European context, Oslo has experienced significant rises in housing prices and mortgages in recent years (Nordahl, 2014). In the last decade (2010–2020), the housing prices in Oslo have almost doubled (increased by 89 per cent). Since the year 2000 housing prices in Oslo have risen by 256 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2020a). This means that today a person in Oslo will have to pay approximately 7 times her yearly salary for a 50 square meter apartment, compared to 4 times their yearly salary in the year 2002. In the second tire cities Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger a person pays approximately 4,5 times their average salary for a 50 square meter apartment, which is comparable to the national average (Statistics Norway, 2020e, 2020f). This situation has been described by Galster and Wessel (2019) as posing challenges for Norway's egalitarian social structure due to the uneven accumulation and concentration of wealth through investment in urban housing. Overall, the benefits of private homeownership and the shift towards urban ideologies of life have nurtured a market-centric conceptualisation of housing in Norway (Kjærås, 2021; Nordahl, 2014; Sørvoll & Nordvik, 2019).

Yet, in Oslo recent events foreshadow a shift in which the market-based housing scheme is increasingly challenged and repoliticised on several fronts. The conjuncture of compact urbanism and a market-based housing system also makes for a situation where the faults of this model are amplified, and solutions found within the housing market is increasingly perceived as inadequate. The idea that a third housing sector can be an alternative to the current housing crisis has gained considerable momentum in recent years.

4.1. The third housing sector

The third housing sector is a term that describes a low- or non-profit housing sector often supported by state and municipal subsidisation, legislation and regulation, cohering a rather broad variety of models for housing development, ownership and organisation. In cities like Vienna this loosely defined sector can be used to describe approx. 60 per cent of the city's total housing units – also defined as subsidised social housing with rent controls and strong tenant rights (City of Vienna, 2019). While Vienna is experiencing tendencies of liberalisation (Kadi, 2015), their subsidised housing system serves as a significant context for transurban learning in Oslo. Initiatives such as the International Building Exhibition Vienna (IBA_Vienna, 2022) "New Social Housing" have become a popular arena for sharing knowledge on affordable housing solutions. Providing housing for the general population, the third housing sector is not a withdrawal of the state in housing but rather an alternative

economic and organisational model often engaging non-profit organisations, non-governmental organisations, cooperatives and social enterprises through regulation and subsidisation. It differs from more direct public housing schemes like that which exists in Singapore where the government is responsible for the provision and organisation of homes for 73 percent of the resident population (Phang, 2018, p. 3).

Despite Norway's recent history of a publicly subsidised and regulated housing system, the third housing sector is foreign to the Norwegian context today. Most housing is provided through market-based provision and organisation, with only a small portion of housing (4 percent) organised through direct state involvement. In this context, the third housing sector represents an alternative to the status quo, assuming state subsidisation and the regulation of profit, while not entailing direct state involvement. Whereas third sector initiatives typically are associated with voluntary organisations, the term 'third sector' in this context broadly includes all actors that adheres to low- or non-profit organisation models for the provision and management of housing. These models provide long-term tenure security and regulation of profit organised through rental or ownership structures.

With the election of centre-left municipal government in Oslo in 2015, the third housing sector became a term describing a progressive shift towards re-establishing 'the lost politics of housing' following from the shift towards a market-based housing system in the 1980s (interview with architect). The local coalition government (including the Labour Party, the Green Party and the Socialist Left Party) in Oslo identified an agenda for establishing a non-profit housing sector termed the third housing sector and with their re-election in 2019 stated

> a need for a municipal housing policy that facilitates housing provision for the part of the population who have problems finding suitable housing in the regular market-based housing scheme and that falls outside the municipal housing market with municipal rental housing for the disadvantaged (City of Oslo, 2019, p. 7).

The city further described this group as belonging to a typically low- or middle-income group made up of teachers, public employees, nurses, carpenters, police officers and service industry employees. As stated by a political secretary for the city councillor for urban development in Oslo "we are experiencing this [vaguely defined group] to be expanding." While homeownership in Oslo is high compared to many other capital cities, the Nurse Index (Real Estate Norway, 2021) shows that a person with an average income in Norway (e.g., a nurse) can afford to purchase 1,3 percent of the available housing stock in Oslo. The target group for the third housing sector can as such be viewed as increasingly relevant to a larger portion of the population.

On the whole, the formal politics of the third housing sector consists of the City of Oslo's commitment to provide 1000 third housing sector units within 2023, with the long-term goal of making 20 percent of housing in Oslo affordable (City of Oslo, 2019b, p. 37). There is considerable ambiguity with regards to what type of housing provision and organisation which will constitute such a sector, i.e., whether the solutions provided will truly be beyond the market model. Nevertheless, the third housing sector is central to the process of repoliticising housing in Oslo. Not through the wholesale replacement of one policy model by another, but rather by the more gradual contestation and reframing of what is possible and desirable in the sector – using among other strategies, references to different housing models from elsewhere. As such, the third housing sector can be understood as a placeholder for identifying and framing the political problem of housing as an issue for the urban middle class, providing a direction for a line of escape from the current housing system, without necessarily being sufficient on its own in transforming the housing system in Oslo.

4.2. *Mobilising the failure of housing*

The failure of housing policies in Norway typically takes their form through two interrelated narratives. First, a popular narrative holds that the failure of housing was corrected with the liberalisation of the regulated housing system in the 1980s, curbing the rumoured black market that developed in the price-regulated housing system (Sørvoll, 2014). Secondly, faults in housing are often perceived as the failure of inefficiency and regulatory and bureaucratic lags, presenting the problem of affordable housing as a technical issue of meeting market demand. This commonplace way of understanding the failure of housing in Oslo can be described as depoliticised and is advocated for by developers, also supported by many planners, politicians and citizens.

While it is still contested terrain, there is a growing narrative of housing failure that goes beyond these forms. A differentiated *genealogy* of housing failure can be identified. Recent events provide evidence for a shift in the way the failures of housing in Oslo are understood and mobilised. In our analysis of newspaper articles, we find that in the last few years a broader range of actors (across the political spectrum) are emphasising that the housing system is in a state of crisis in Oslo; it is failing a growing portion of the population. For example, Socialist Left Party leader Audun Lysbakken describes the housing market as an 'inequality-machine', stating, '[w]e have a desperate need for a housing politics for single parents, nurses, auxiliary nurses and many others' (Spence, 2019). The third housing sector is increasingly being brought into these discussions as an alternative to the status quo.

Understanding how this new genealogy of housing failure is taking hold requires attention to how the undercurrent of ignored dissatisfaction is being expressed and articulated beyond established political terrains. Speaking to experiences of everyday realities of housing in the city, some actors are making alliances across established divides and situating the problem of housing as a collective, rather than an individual issue. Associating one's own failure in attaining a dignified housing situation with other people's inability to do the same is part of repoliticising housing. Urban actors in Oslo are mobilising and drawing together a differentiated referencescape for housing by tracing empirical and conceptual connections between multiple situations and conditions that are ignored in the mainstream discourse. In effect, they are *making alterity move* (Hart, 2018; Katz, 2001). This work of mobilization holds a particular spatiality in that it involves associating the failure of housing across different, yet similar, places, groups and areas of interest.

A representative of one of these actors, the action group The Housing Rebellion (Boligopprøret), described the emergent politicisation of housing as broadening the scope of politics as it necessitates a reformed understanding of *the genealogy of the outcome* of housing failure in Oslo:

> The problem becomes huge by this little thing that has to do with rent. And that is what we are trying to say to politicians 'remove your blindfolds and look around and see the ripple effects of your politics.' Because it's actually about a little more than what people have to give in rent. It's about what people have to *give up* to pay rent (our emphasis).

The municipality's work in carving out a policy space for a third housing sector plays a particular role in allowing actors to frame the problem of housing as a structural issue. Speaking to this new situation the representative from The Housing Rebellion said, "what has changed at the municipal level is that people are now talking about housing policy and especially municipal housing policy." In turn, the action group now demands changes in the municipal housing politics pertaining the municipal housing company Boligbygg Oslo KF, who provides rental housing for people who qualify for public sector housing in Oslo. The recent attention given to the municipal's role in housing politics provides legitimatisation for their political claims and allows them to mobilise 'their problem' as a structural issue beyond the public housing sector.

While the Housing Rebellion representative expressed concern that the newfound interest in the third sector might overshadow public housing, the third housing sector discourse also presents opportunity for

articulating the failure of public housing in general and the failure of municipal housing in Oslo in particular, to a more general public. While arranging protests and group meetings with tenants in municipal housing is an important part of the action group's work, they are also experiencing a surge in interest and are being invited into discussions with politicians and other interest groups. Rearticulating the genealogy of housing failure may as such be seen to rely on the collective and heterogenous endeavour of relating ignored situations to each other (Massey, 2011).

Similar articulations are being forged in some of the marginalised areas in Oslo where the stark contrast between municipal housing and a liberalised ownership and rental market gives middle-to low-income earners few options for bettering their situation; and by low-income groups like artists who find it increasingly difficult to live and work in the city. Common to these different groups are the forsaken aspiration to own their own apartment. As stated by one of the local actors in the neighbourhood Tøyen in Oslo, "The most important thing for me is to be able to have a secure home for 10 years and not 3 years." This reality is increasingly being recognised as reflecting the inequality that the housing system in Oslo constitutes, making the difference between young and old, low-income and high-income, urban and rural, immigrant or non-immigrant significant.

The Instagram account 'Min_drittleilighet' (My shit apartment) showcases poor living conditions for rental apartments in Oslo and Norway more generally, revealing situations such as mouldy apartment walls, inflated rents, bug infestations and bundles of email correspondences with landlords. After interviewing the people behind the account for a newspaper article, the journalist Jørgensen (2020) stated "They have given up. Welcome to the first generation who has given up on becoming homeowners." While 'merely' gathering a collection of rental experiences, this Instagram account and the corresponding action group Reduce the Housing Rent (Reduser Husleia) is part of rearticulating what the failure in housing looks like for renters in Oslo and other cities in Norway. As such, rearticulating the failure of housing may in Swyngedouw's (2017: 58) words be said to "[interrupt] the common sense of the situation" and establish the ground from where people may become political subjects. For members of the action group Reduce the Housing Rent this is certainly the case, and several young individuals connected to this group are becoming forceful political voices.

Typically representing young renters this group is associating their struggle with groups such as 'The Housing Rebellion' and the more established tenant association 'Leierboerforening' through their demand for decommodified housing in Oslo. Reduce the Housing Rent is also forging counterhegemonic relations to others in similar situations and struggles in other cities. Writing about the Norwegian real estate company 'Heimstaden' who own rental apartments in Oslo and Berlin, the group depicts how resistance movements in Berlin are mobilising against international real estate companies.

The role of the third housing sector in gathering these autonomous struggles of housing in Oslo is significant in that it moves failure in housing from specific contexts and group struggles to structural causal frames. While arguably being situated at the margins of formal policy processes, these groups are using their lived experience to symbolize the legitimacy of their demands and claim their stake in a future third housing sector. For example, City of Oslo City Council leader, Raymond Johansen (Labor Party), and City Councillor for urban development, Arild Hermstad (Green Party), responded to The Reduce the Housing Rent's demand for a 100 000 decommodified rental units in Oslo in a newspaper article stating that there is no 'miracle cure' (Johnson & Hermstad, 2020). Conforming the structural inequalities laid bare by the action group, Johansen and Hermstad outline the city's work with a third housing sector as a 'radical political shift' while also stating that national regulatory changes are necessary. Groups like Reduce the Housing Rent may in this way be viewed as directing how the narrative of the failure of housing in Oslo is being articulated.

These claims to the failure of housing for different people across the city, and the simultaneous articulation of failures in housing elsewhere, allows multiple ignored situations to be associated and connected across groups and contexts. Learning the failure of housing in Oslo can as such be understood to be taking place through expressions of everyday experiences of housing in the capital and the associative politics of extension and translation drawing similarities across differences—identifying the genealogy of the problem, sticking to autonomous causes and forging shared intentions. To understand repoliticisation, the renewed mobilisation of housing failure in Oslo may be viewed as exemplifying how attention to the diverse and multiple spatialities of ignored dissatisfaction is necessary for understanding how and from where actors articulate "demands that lie beyond the existing situation" (Swyngedouw, 2017, p. 60).

4.3. *Mobilising housing alternatives from elsewhere*

The repoliticisation of the housing sector is not just focused on making failure visible, it is also mobilising an understanding that there are alternatives to the status quo. Attempting to expand the concept of 'what is possible', actors are referencing and translating alternatives from elsewhere. The third housing sector may therefore be viewed as a signifier for housing policies that go beyond the realm of the market.

While the third housing sector early on was an initiative advocated for by the Red Party, recent years have seen this sector positively debated by parties such as the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, as well as the parties in the city government (the Green Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Labour Party). In our analysis of newspaper articles, we find that all these parties in their discussion of the potential for a third housing sector are making references to policies from cities such as Vienna, Zurich, Copenhagen and Stockholm. The Conservative Party has been the only party consistently critiquing the third housing sector as either vague, too expensive, ineffective or as a model that will deprive a subdivision of the population of the opportunity to profit from rising housing prices. Rather, the Conservative Party has argued for building smaller apartments, reducing regulatory demands and increasing the rate of new construction.

The City of Oslo has spent considerable time researching and learning about housing policies in other European cities through study trips, reports and a range of local and *trans*-local meetings, round tables, networks and debates. A municipal employee working for the city council notes, "the current city council is more concerned with international relations than the previous city council." Visiting cities like Vienna, Copenhagen, Berlin, London, Dusseldorf and Zurich city planners, politicians and officials have discovered both that Norway has one of the most deregulated housing markets in Europe and that other cities have radically different housing systems. For the general public in Oslo these cities 'perform' through a variety of events—in books, reports, exhibitions, meetings, talks, building competitions, newspaper articles, and conferences, through their multiple modes of presentation and contextualisation. This illustrates the spatial character of the referencescape of housing alternatives. The emerging housing alternatives and the way they are referenced in the debates in Oslo can also be viewed as comparative in nature (Robinson, 2016), and as the following discussion will depict, they politicize the housing market in Oslo through *interstitial* processes (Katz, 1996).

The ubiquitous quality of these networked activities differentiates them from more direct political expressions, emphasising their generative character in rearticulating the 'lost [...] politics of housing' (interview with architect). For example, an encyclopaedia of alternative housing developments and development models collected on behalf of a local city council in Oslo (Prosser et al., 2017) provides reference points for developers, politicians, activists and others showcasing different housing models and projects. Such work provides a starting point for constructing an alternative referencescape of housing in Oslo. As one informant states, "many of the terms do not exist in Norway" (interview with local entrepreneur). Terms such as 'building groups' and

'community trusts' are foreign in a Norwegian context and one actor describes how they are translating these concepts by for example providing definitions on Wikipedia. Extending the referencescape in turn has a politicising effect, by placing the liberal Norwegian model into contrast, introducing different models, and expanding notions of what is possible.

This broad strategy of opening up the political terrain to a wide variety of non-profit or limited profit housing models includes a broad range of actors beyond the municipality; architects, artists, state actors, developers, unions and civil actors are taking part in extending the realm of housing politics in Oslo. In 2018, the exhibition 'House Viewing' at the National Architecture Museum in Oslo critically approached 'the standard of urban living' through a retrospective of Norwegian housing politics, critique of the current trajectory of urban development in Oslo and a display of a range of housing alternatives such as Sargfabrikken (Vienna), R50 (Berlin) and Ablelund Gyngemosen (Copenhagen). Structured according to the four pillars of the Viennese housing competition scheme,[2] the exhibition placed itself within clear references to a European context and operationalised a logic foreign to Oslo. The exhibition was complemented by a new permanent retrospective exhibition on Norwegian housing ideals. As the curator for the housing exhibition stated, "We compared ourselves with some other cities […]. Because it is so easy to think when you […] live in a system and have grown up in a system that it is a natural system." The curator held that alternative models from other cities perform as conceptual devices to reframe the dominant discourses of housing and to showcase that it is possible to live well in a very different housing system. The comparative gestures described here can be understood as generative, as they, rather than working through opposition, allows people to imagine different ways of living good and sustainable livelihoods.

The politics of extending the referencescape for housing provides a tool for learning to identify comparatively significant elements in the housing system (such as e.g., property prices and subsidisation models) and for challenging established truths. The nature of speculative ownership (i.e., viewing housing as an economic investment) presents such a truth. Homeownership holds a particular position in the Norwegian housing system. As stated by journalist Jørgensen (2020) in a newspaper article "the cross-party agreement that everyone should own their own home is still so strong that the crisis in the housing market is met with measures such as lowering the threshold for first-time buyers." Whereas housing models from cities like Vienna provides, what author and journalist Gyberg (2020) calls, "a third way between ownership and tenancy: That is, apartments with indefinite and almost irrevocable contracts that can often be inherited by the next generation", several informants voiced a fear of curbing the speculative potential in housing, because people experience it as a desirable aspect of owning a home. Homeownership, in a Norwegian context, may therefore be viewed as having become closely entangled with economic profit. The paradox, as a public advisor for the City of Oslo notes, is that "[homeownership] worked much better under the housing cooperative system, when prices was regulated".

Although aspirations towards homeownership within the current housing system is starting to crack in Oslo, the interstitial alternatives remain hard to grasp. While critique directed at developers and large property owners is persistent, the task of disassociating ownership and speculatory practices appears difficult for people invested in urban homeownership.

In interviews with informants, it was clear that learning about different housing systems by drawing such references into the debate 'at home' extended the realm for questioning established truths of housing in Oslo. For example, the fact that in Vienna "you can live really well all your life for a much cheaper price" (curator National Architecture Museum). Charting similarities and differences by drawing relations to other cities can therefore be seen as playing a central role in repoliticising housing, especially for the part of the population that do not necessarily experience the failures of housing in Oslo themselves. For the part of the population already invested in housing in Oslo it might provide a position from where to acknowledge that there are more valuable aspirations in housing than wealth creation. Significantly, this is not only a position of solidarity in name of equality, but a position where individuals may learn an escape route from the mortgage burden that structure their livelihoods. These interstitial practices of rearticulating the discursive frames from which one's own reality within the housing system resides involves thereby a particular spatiality where uneven geographies of housing system de/re-regulation provide generative ground for repoliticisation.

However, the comparative gestures made through showcasing and learning about differences and similarities in housing systems other places only seems to go so far in instigating alternatives at home. As pointed out by an informant, "Norwegians like to be inspired to some degree. So they go on a study trip 'yeah exciting, exciting, exciting.' [and] then they come back and it's a bit like 'yes, but … '" (interview with municipal employee). While informants acknowledge that there are no *one* solutions that can be copied from another city, several actors are working to produce generative translations of foreign models by mobilising historical policies from pre-1980s, some still existing as 'useless relics' in legislation or as fragments of Norway's historical housing system.

In a recent architecture competition for Hauskvartalet, a controversial urban ecology quarter in inner-city Oslo, the architects were asked to produce alternative housing solutions. The quarter has a long history, first occupied in 1999 to protest the lack of affordable housing in Oslo, the area has through the last 20 years developed as a site for alternative urban livelihoods. After many of the properties were bought by private developers in 2016, the legitimacy of the solutions brought forth has been scrutinized. While several architects were critical of engaging in the conceptual competition for the site, four architecture firms developed proposals for the site. One architecture firm attempted to translate the Viennese low- and non-profit model by using a more familiar non-profit solution created for securing urban allotment gardens—a model quite familiar to Oslo residents. While this solution will most likely not be taken forward by the developers, it is significant in that it connects the Viennese housing model, via an urban allotment garden model in Oslo, to the inner-city development linking a different register of urban ownership logics. The ownership model for the allotment garden attends to a fragment of Norway's post-war property regime (i.e., of regulated prices and long-term leases) and allowed for a generative translation of the Viennese housing project. Such translations challenge the 'novelty' that is often implicitly inscribed in political alternatives, by providing autonomous translations and mutual modification of existing local and foreign models.

In discussion with a newly established non-profit housing association, a conscious attitude was expressed, "we both look backwards at Norwegian history and outwards to contemporary Europe and try to match these" (interview with local entrepreneur). Similarly, in another housing project at the outskirts of Oslo some actors have established a non-profit cooperative housing association (of young artists) and are attempting to convince the city to provide a long-term lease for the property (a significant part of the Norwegian housing model before the 1980s). While the legal framework for resurrecting older legislation of this kind is complex and potentially impossible within the current legal framework, it provides a reminder of the actuality of historical models and approaches. As a self-proclaimed Centre Party voter stated in a newspaper article, defending third sector solutions in Oslo, "[t]he regulatory mechanisms that we have removed have proven to work very well in Vienna" (Norheim, 2020).

While several informants (independent architects, activists,

[2] The Viennese competition model is a four-pillar model where subsidised housing projects are evaluated by a jury according to four criteria: ecology, costs, planning and social sustainability (Förster and Menking, 2017, p. 11).

developers) were wary of invoking the past as it brought with it a rather delegitimising romanticised tinge, these gestures seem to provide a 'bridge' for contextualising and translating models and policies from other cities. Therefore, housing policies and models from the past can be seen as being a significant part of the emergent referencescape.

The parallel reality evoked is at once local and foreign, providing a powerful momentum to repoliticise housing by displacing the legitimacy of the present. Understood as an interstitial process, the repoliticisation of housing in Oslo involves small but multiple gestures that suggest altered conditions for housing, while being inevitably prone to failure. As the policy mobility literature highlights, the potential generative effects of the fuzzy geographic spaces of policy frontiers are not adherent to successful implementation of a policy. But describes the long, incremental and cautious struggle towards an alternative political trajectory (Longhurst & McCann, 2016).

4.4. The referencescape of housing as a strategy for repoliticisation

In understanding the role of the third housing sector in repoliticising housing in Oslo, the third housing sector can be described as a signifier that holds together a contested project of differentiation in housing. On its own, insufficient in systematically changing the faults of housing in Oslo. Yet the third housing sector brings together a referencescape of housing that affirms difference by, firstly, rearticulating the failure of housing in Oslo, and secondly, mobilising a range of alternative housing models. Gathering the rather ordinary ideals of seeking to secure dignified relations of housing, the third housing sector appears to be playing to a different tune than the logics of markets and the profit motive.

In Oslo, this involves rearticulating the character of the general population and its relationship to housing—both in the sense that many people are not represented within the realm of homeowners in the market-based model, and by the fact that the values on which homeownership is based have been shifted from security to speculation. The third housing sector narrative speaks to the experience of everyday life for those who are not represented by the popular narrative of housing and for those who see an opportunity to escape the current limitations of the for-profit housing model, particularly high personal debt accumulation. By making alternatives legitimate, "legible *and* viable" (Katz, 1995, p. 167), the third housing sector can be viewed to be working interstitially, using the openings and cracks in the hegemonic system to multiply and expand understandings of what housing should be.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have outlined a spatial approach to repoliticisation. This contributes to ongoing debates about the post-political condition and the mobility of policy ideas. We advance those debates by attuning them to repoliticisation—the way people reconsider what is politically possible. Empirically we have examined repoliticisation regarding the question of housing; specifically, how the emerging discourse of a third housing sector in Oslo has challenged hegemonic ideals and practices of a liberalised housing system. We have depicted how the third housing sector plays a role in configuring a differentiated referencescape of the failure and success of housing. First, we illustrated how housing failure is mobilised by groups in Oslo that have lost the aspiration of becoming homeowners and are struggling to secure dignified housing relations in the city. Building on everyday realities, these actors forge alliances by mobilising a differentiated genealogy of housing failure and situate the problem of housing as a collective rather than an individual issue.

Second, we have shown how actors work to expand the political territory of housing by situating local and foreign actors, models, ideas and projects in novel conjunctions. In Oslo local historical models appear to be functioning as a bridge for translating foreign housing models, ideologies and approaches. This emerging referencescape of housing is part of repoliticising housing by revealing the structural effects of housing failure in Oslo and the possible alternatives that exist elsewhere. While the third housing sector holds an undetermined role in directing the future of housing policy in Oslo, its role as a tool for politicisation has been influential, also beyond Oslo. For example, after city planner Larry Beasley returned from a visit to Scandinavia in 2017, he came back to Vancouver with the message that his home city was in need of a third housing sector too (Bramham, 2017). As a case city, Oslo represents a relevant area of study, not only because of the recent revival of housing politics, but also due to Norway's social democratic welfarist legacy. In the realm of housing, this legacy is decisively absent in the contemporary articulation of Norway's housing regime, suggesting that, the heritage of the Nordic social democratic welfarist model is far from a linear trajectory (Haarstad et al., 2021). Rather than a coherent mode, it appears more as a patchworked and fragmented reality, present in certain policy areas and absent in others.

Overall, this paper suggests that the constitutive process of politicisation relies upon a particular geography of coeval production of difference. While difference is often conceptualised in essentialist terms as "constituted through isolation and separation" (Massey, 2005, p. 68), this analysis suggests that the politicisation of housing can be understood as occurring through autonomous translations in multiple terrains. Rather than eliciting a pure difference—an 'other'—the failures, models, policies and ideas that are brought together (and potentially fall apart) rely upon their mutual modification and translation to become 'real'. In Oslo, the third housing sector brings contested and diverging projects of differentiation in housing into the same frame of reference. These multiple and diverging articulations of housing that are emerging in Oslo and that draw on an extensive geography of housing models can be understood as a geography of repoliticisation. This illustrates that politicisation is a relational process, rather than simply a set of singular events. For research, this suggests that more emphasis should be placed on the translations and mobilisation of alternatives and contestations across different fields, places and political spaces.

Lastly, understanding how housing is being politicised not only has relevance within *the housing sector* alone, it is an intricate part of the politics of urban life. Cities, now widely considered the solution to human survival in face of the climate crisis *and* a site for financial growth, produce particular contradictions in terms urban sustainability. In this context, housing politics represents a fundamental interlocutor for emancipatory social change.

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None.

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