

Symposium: The political economy of housing production under late neoliberalism

Date: Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd May 2025

Venue: Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, London.

Organisers: Dr Chris Foye (University College London), Dr Edward Shepherd (Cardiff University), and Dr. Lan Deng (University of Michigan).

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Summary

This 2-day symposium will bring together state-of-the-art research that re-centres the political economy of *housebuilding* in housing studies, focussing on the broader political, economic and ideological structures which condition – and are conditioned by – the different actors involved in the *housebuilding industry*. It does so at a time of political-economic contradiction and ideological fragmentation: despite acute housing unaffordability, housing supply across the world has failed to meet needs, calling into question the relative roles of the state and market in delivering this economically and politically critical good. It is intended that the symposium will result in a Special Issue on the topic with *Housing, Theory and Society* (subject to conditions below).

Background: the research gap

Historically, social scientists have taken a keen interest in the political economy of housing production (Ball, 1978; Ball and Harloe, 1982). However, with the hegemonic rise of neoliberalism in the West, many states withdrew from the direct production of housing, leaving the private sector largely in control of housing production. According to the dominant neoclassical economic paradigm, so long as the state didn't 'interfere', private housing production would be competitive and efficient (e.g. Green and Malpezzi, 2003). In this political and ideological context, the housebuilding industry thus became increasingly abstracted into a single line on a supply-demand graph in equilibrium.

But the hegemony of neoliberalism was never total, and in many contexts (most notably China) the state maintained a significant role in the direct production of housing. Moreover, post Global Financial Crisis, fissures have opened in the Western neoliberal consensus under the pressures of widening wealth inequalities driven by price inflation of land and housing assets. The main route to wealth for many under capitalism now appears closed off. As more people are locked out of participation in the property-owning democracy, the political legitimacy of governments has therefore been challenged. This has prompted questions about the political viability of relying on 'the market' to meet housing needs and has opened up the possibility of a more active state in the delivery and management of housing. And yet, with the exception of the single/multi-family rental sector (Fields, 2018; Christophers, 2023), social scientists still pay relatively little attention to the political-economy of the housebuilding industry (Moreno-Zacarés, 2024: 2; Kohl and Spielau, 2022).

The Symposium

This symposium aims to address this gap by bringing together scholarship on the relationship between housing production and its broader political-economic and ideological contexts. We define housing production broadly to include all the key stakeholders such as landowners, developers, investors, contractors and other state, private and non-profit entities involved in the production of housing across different tenures. We welcome articles across different disciplines including (but not limited to) political economy, sociology, planning, geography, and heterodox economics. What is crucial is that the articles utilise (and ideally advance) theories to analyse specific empirical contexts, including contexts beyond the Anglosphere and the Global North.

For example, we would welcome abstracts on any of the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- Structure of the housebuilding industry, including market and structural power relations between the state and different private actors.
- The role of the housebuilding industry under rentier capitalism.
- The ideological positioning of the housebuilding industry in relation to broader political-economic narratives.
- The ecological limits of housing development and how these are constructed and contested by the housebuilding industry and state actors in different contexts.
- Disruptions and adjustments of the housebuilding industry in response to major global crises and how they have shaped the structural relations within and outside the industry.
- Spatial political-economic perspectives that grapple with geographical differences in systems of housing provision.
- Other relationships between housing production and the broader political economy, and the various tensions and contradictions therein.

The exact format of the symposium is to be confirmed, but it will mainly revolve around each of the authors presenting their research papers in detail (>30 minutes), followed by feedback and discussion. *It is therefore essential that attendees have a substantive paper to present at the Symposium.*

Funding

We have secured funding to cover all meals for the 2-day symposium, including dinner on Thursday 22nd May. We also have funding to subsidise participants' travel costs and accommodation. When applying for the symposium, please state how much funding you would require to attend the symposium with a short justification about why these funds can't be secured elsewhere. We particularly welcome submissions from early career scholars and those from outside the Anglosphere/Global North.

Journal special issue

We anticipate that the symposium will result in a special issue in *Housing, Theory and Society* journal, edited by the organisers (Foye, Shepherd and Deng). All papers, however, will need to go through the standard journal peer review process and the special issue is conditional on there being enough papers accepted for publication. More details on the journal's special issue policy [here](#).

Timeline

The timeline for the symposium and special issue is set as follows. Please only apply if you can meet these deadlines. The application form – due on 3rd March 2025 - is accessible [here](#).

3 March 2025	Submission deadline for applications (see link above for application form)
17 March 2025	All applicants informed of decision and funding allocation
22 – 23 May 2025	2-day symposium at Bartlett School of Planning, UCL. Attendees will be expected to present substantive papers.
2 June 2025	Attendees will be invited to prepare full paper for special issue (if presentation at the Symposium is of sufficient quality)
September 2025	Deadline for draft paper submission. Feedback will be provided by Special Issue Editors
December 2025	Papers submitted to <i>Housing, Theory and Society</i> to go through formal peer review process

We thank UCL and University of Michigan for providing financial support for the symposium.