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Typology of Socially Innovative Housing Solutions in Europe

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Executive Summary

European housing systems are facing increasing pressure as rising costs, financialization, and the retrenchment of public provision deepen housing inequalities across the continent. The report conceptualizes the housing crisis as a structural outcome of growing inequality, shaped by the limitations of the dominant state–market model of housing provision.

In this context, a diverse range of alternative and collaborative housing initiatives has emerged to address unmet housing needs. However, the field remains fragmented, making it difficult for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to understand how these initiatives function, how they differ, and what their broader potential is.

This report addresses this gap by introducing a social innovation framework and developing a typology of socially innovative housing initiatives. Together, these provide a structured way to understand how alternative housing models can contribute not only to improved housing outcomes, but also to durable change in European housing systems. Socially innovative housing initiatives are positioned as responses that can intervene in these dynamics in several ways. They introduce new actors – such as cooperatives, community groups, and non-profit organisations – into housing provision, thereby diversifying who engages in delivering housing. They also contribute to the redistribution of housing resources, for example by providing below-market housing and developing non-speculative financial and ownership models. Crucially, these initiatives can reshape power relations in housing systems by promoting collective decision-making, participatory governance, and alternative tenure arrangements. In doing so, they can lead to more equitable housing outcomes, particularly in terms of affordability, accessibility, and security. While their impact is often incremental and context-dependent, some initiatives demonstrate the potential to contribute to broader housing system transformation.

To better understand this diverse field, the report develops a typology that identifies five ideal-typical forms of socially innovative housing: (1) social mandate, (2) prefigurative commons, (3) collectivised rental, (4) collectivised ownership, and (5) collaborative ownership.

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These types are distinguished based on how they organize access to housing, how they relate to dominant housing market logics, and how governance, tenure, and value distribution are structured. The typology does not rank these models but highlights their different strengths, limitations, and pathways towards impact. Importantly, the typology should not be seen as a tool that directly measures transformative potential. Rather, it provides a structured framework for identifying the conditions under which such potential may emerge – such as the degree of collective control, long-term affordability mechanisms, or institutional embedding.

The typology has three key applications. First, it will support case study selection and provide a framework for comparative research in the subsequent report, which will complete the WP6 research effort of the EqualHouse project. By clearly distinguishing between distinct types of initiatives, the typology enables more systematic analysis of how various models perform across contexts and which conditions support their success and scalability. Second, for the wider research community, it offers a common analytical framework for comparative housing studies. Researchers can use it to select cases with shared characteristics or to compare fundamentally different approaches, helping to overcome the fragmentation that currently characterizes the field. Third, and most importantly for policymakers and practitioners, the typology functions as a diagnostic and strategic tool. It helps situate specific housing initiatives within a broader landscape of socially innovative solutions, making it easier to assess their potential contributions and limitations. This can inform more targeted policy support, facilitate collaboration and exchange between actors, and guide the development of strategies to scale or replicate successful models. In essence, socially innovative housing initiatives are not a uniform solution to the housing crisis. However, when they successfully combine the fulfilment of housing needs with changes in social relations and governance structures, they can play a meaningful role in addressing housing inequality and reshaping housing systems. By providing both a conceptual framework and a practical typology, this report equips policymakers, practitioners, and researchers with the tools needed to better understand, support, and leverage these initiatives in the pursuit of more just and equitable housing futures.

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Table of Terms

Alternative Housing Form/Model	Understanding in this report
Housing First	Housing First is a homelessness response housing model where stable housing is provided as a first response, as soon as possible, without attaching conditions such as a requirement to abstain from drugs and alcohol (as is the case in most traditional homelessness services) (Housing First Europe, 2026). The philosophy of this approach is that solving the housing problem is the first step in solving most of the other problems a homeless person struggles with.
Meanwhile Use Housing	Meanwhile use or property guardianship (*antikraak* in Dutch) refers to the authorised, relatively short-term use of vacant urban properties that await redevelopment. Tenants have the right to live in the property at a reduced rent, for a fixed duration or with a limited notice period, whilst the landlord avoids the risk of the vacant property being vandalised or occupied by squatters.
Social Rental Agencies	Social rental agencies are non-profit, affordable housing models, where a professional intermediary organisation (e.g. a nonprofit organisation or a public company) manages privately owned properties (in some cases social rental agencies can also manage public housing stocks) and rents them out at affordable rates.
Squatting	Squatting is the informal and illegalised practice of individually or collectively occupying vacant properties without agreement from the owner.
Rental/Zero-Equity Cooperatives (Rental Cooperatives hereafter)	In rental cooperatives, residents collectively manage a multi-unit property through a legal entity (usually a cooperative), which owns the property in an undivided way. Residents are members of the cooperative to which they pay monthly rents to cover loan repayments and maintenance costs. The initial investment is covered by the cooperative and not by individual members; and in rental cooperatives residents do not accumulate shared ownership equity.
Mutual Homeownership Societies	Mutual homeownership societies (MHOS) function highly similar to limited equity cooperatives (see below), but often take on a different legal and ownership form.
Intentional Communities and Ecovillages	Intentional communities are a residential arrangement in which residents consciously live together to pursue shared social, political, ecological or cultural values and actively organise their use of housing to reflect those values. This model often intersects with varying cooperative, group-build as well as cohousing model features.
Limited Equity Cooperatives	In limited equity cooperatives, residents collectively own and manage a multi-unit property through a legal entity (usually a cooperative), in which residents buy and own shares, in addition to paying monthly fees that cover maintenance costs and loan repayments. The property is owned by the cooperative in an undivided way, but residents are able to accumulate some – limited – equity during their membership. The resale price of the cooperative shares is capped – typically through a resale formula that values the cooperative shares over time – to preserve long-term accessibility of the project.
Community Land Trusts	Community land trusts (CLTs) place land in collective or public ownership, where it is democratically governed to serve the needs of the community. Residents can buy or rent individual properties which are built on the land, at below-market cost. In case of ownership, CLT homes can only be sold through a resale formula and often additional allocation criteria apply, to ensure that the units stay accessible and affordable for a specific target group.
Cohousing	Cohousing initiatives show a great variation in the tenure and legal forms they adopt, but they share a large conceptual overlap with intentional communities in the sense that one of their common principles is that they are founded on a set of values and visions that is

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	shared between residents. In addition to this they also involve and foster strong social relations between residents, which is also reflected in the shared spaces that are included in the physical design of cohousing projects (Czischke et al., 2020). These projects usually have smaller private spaces and larger shared spaces. Rather than legal or financial arrangements, the focus of these initiatives is on sharing during everyday life. These projects can be bottom-up, driven by the future residents, or top-down, developed by market actors aiming to cater to future residents looking for community living.
Ownership/Equity or Market-Equity Cooperatives (Ownership Cooperatives hereafter)	In ownership cooperatives, similar to limited-equity cooperatives, residents collectively own and manage a multi-unit property through a legal entity (usually a cooperative). To enter or exit this model residents buy or sell cooperative shares at an open market rate. The residents own their own apartments – ie. the shares owned by residents are connected to a specific apartment. Thus, in practice ownership rights can be practiced in a quasi-similar way to an apartment owned in a condominium.
Group-build housing development	Self-build communities (*Baugruppen* in German) engage in a form of collective housing development in which a group of future residents jointly initiates, plans, finances, and commissions the construction of their housing as a more social, democratic and (initially) affordable alternative to developer-led volume building (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2013). After the phase of development these housing units usually become regular ownership apartments.

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1 Introduction

European housing systems are undergoing profound strain. Rising housing costs, increasing financialization, and the retrenchment of social housing provision have contributed to deepening inequalities in access to adequate, secure, and affordable housing. In many contexts, the dominant state-market model of housing provision has proven insufficient to meet the needs of a growing share of the population. Against this backdrop, a wide range of alternative and collaborative housing initiatives has emerged across Europe. These initiatives seek to provide new housing pathways by mobilising collective action, experimenting with non-speculative models, and reconfiguring the roles of different actors in housing provision.

Despite growing academic and policy interest in alternative and collaborative housing, there remains limited clarity and consensus on how such initiatives can be effectively mobilised as responses to the housing crisis, what their transformative impacts may be, and how their often counter-hegemonic character – meaning they not only offer alternatives but also challenge the underlying assumptions of mainstream housing provision – can be supported through policy and governance frameworks. A commonly cited explanation for this lack of clarity is the conceptual and geographical fragmentation of the research field. Much of the existing literature is based on individual case studies, often grounded in specific national or disciplinary contexts. This has led to a proliferation of models, concepts, and labels that, while valuable in their own right, collectively tend to obscure shared underlying logics and practices and limit the transferability of insights across contexts.

Although several comparative frameworks and typologies of collaborative housing models have been developed, making important contributions by identifying commonalities and differences and by enabling cross-contextual comparison, their scope remains limited in some areas. In particular, existing typologies have not sufficiently addressed the question of how alternative housing initiatives relate to broader processes of housing system transformation and the mitigation of housing inequalities.

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This report focuses on socially innovative housing solutions as a specific subset of these alternative models. Socially innovative housing refers to practices that provide affordable and accessible housing, build solidarity-based relationships, and promote more democratic and inclusive housing governance. With the typology developed in this report, we aim to contribute to a more structured and analytically robust understanding of socially innovative housing initiatives. By grounding the typology in a social innovation framework, the report shifts the focus from descriptive categorisation towards a more process-oriented analysis of how housing initiatives engage with, reproduce, or challenge existing housing regimes. In doing so, it aims to bridge the gap between a structural understanding of housing inequality and the empirical diversity of emerging housing practices.

This is the first report of Work Package 6 (WP6) of the Horizon Europe funded EqualHouse project. The objective of WP6 is to explore the potential of socially innovative housing models, including their capacity to mitigate housing inequalities. In particular, it responds to the limited attention paid to these approaches within the broader literature on housing inequality. WP6 moves beyond the current state of the art by examining how such models are applied across different contexts and by systematically analysing their potential to address inequality through collective, grassroots action. This includes the development of alternative approaches to financing housing provision and organising land ownership.

While socially innovative housing initiatives across Europe remain relatively localised, fragmented, and often difficult to scale – partly due to limited access to conventional financing – they do not operate in isolation. In some cases, they are supported and enabled by institutional actors, including public authorities, foundations, elected officials, financial institutions, and state agencies. This highlights the importance of understanding not only the internal characteristics of these initiatives, but also their relationships with broader governance structures. Accordingly, WP6 examines not only how socially innovative housing models can expand the supply of affordable housing, but also how they may contribute to more democratic and accountable forms of housing governance.

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This first report of WP6 maps the diversity of socially innovative housing initiatives across Europe and develops a typology of these models based on their key innovative features. In the next phase of WP6, which is not covered in this report, four cases will be selected for in-depth study. The selection of these case studies will be guided by the typology developed here, ensuring a structured and comparative approach to analysing different models.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 situates the emergence of alternative housing models within the broader context of housing inequality in Europe, examining the structural limitations of state- and market-led provision and presenting the diversity of alternative housing practices. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework of social innovation, outlining its key dimensions and demonstrating its relevance for analysing housing initiatives and their transformative potential. Chapter 4 builds on these foundations to present the typology of socially innovative housing initiatives, detailing its design, underlying dimensions, and the five ideal types it identifies: social mandate, prefigurative commons, collectivised rental, collectivised ownership, and collaborative ownership. Together, these chapters provide both the conceptual and analytical tools needed to better understand the role of socially innovative housing in addressing housing inequality and shaping future housing systems.

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2 State of the Art on Alternative Housing Models

This chapter examines the structural roots of the increasing inequality in European housing systems and introduces the diverse array of alternative housing models that have emerged in response to this crisis. These models occupy a space between the dominant models of state provision and market allocation. Their recent resurgence follows an increase in unmet needs due to the withdrawal of the state from provision in many countries and the increasing problems lower-to middle-income households face in accessing market housing.

The chapter goes on to map the evolving landscape of alternative housing models and considers how these practices have the potential not only to address immediate needs but also to challenge some of the institutional logics underpinning contemporary housing systems and can ultimately play a role in incrementally transforming housing regimes to produce more equitable outcomes. This chapter sets the stage for Chapter 3, which introduces social innovation as the theoretical lens through which we can understand how alternative models develop this transformative potential. Chapter 4 then brings together the preceding chapters by operationalizing social innovation as a theoretical lens for alternative housing models; this application results in a typology that serves as a tool to navigate the heterogeneity of socially innovative housing initiatives across Europe.

2.1 From Housing Inequality to Alternative Housing Practices

2.1.1 Housing inequalities left unaddressed by state and market

Europe is facing an escalating housing crisis as both states and markets increasingly fail to uphold the right to housing for vulnerable households (Wetzstein, 2017; Dewilde et al., 2025). To identify and understand solutions that can help pull European housing systems out of this crisis state, it is necessary to understand where it originates, how it manifests itself across different housing regimes, and the mechanisms that drive it forward. This is the premise of the first

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deliverable produced in Work Package 3 of the EqualHouse project (Dewilde et al., 2025). This Work Package 3 report adopts what they refer to as "a political economy/stratification-perspective on the production and reproduction of housing inequality", where the housing crisis can be seen as the outcome of processes that strengthen the relationship between "the disadvantage of some" and "the advantage of others" (Dewilde et al., 2025, p. 20). Our report (that is part of Work Package 6 of the same project) adheres to this theoretical perspective to first understand the housing crisis as the outcome of a rise in housing inequality within European housing systems (Dewilde et al., 2025) and then uses this perspective to investigate how innovative and alternative housing practices can contribute to mitigating this growing inequality.

In many European countries, housing is developed and distributed by either the state or the market. This "state/market duopoly" (Weston and Bollier, 2013, p.145) is most prominent in housing systems that rely on and reinforce the idea that housing is an individual responsibility; households with adequate market power individually secure their housing needs through the market (McIntyre and McKee, 2012; Czischke, 2018). At the same time, a residualised stock of state provided or subsidised housing functions merely as a safety net, only there for households that do not have the market power to compete in the housing market (Murie, 1997; Whitehead and Scanlon, 2007). Extensive documentation of the shift towards market-oriented commodification and the subsequent financialization of European housing provision systems, in which housing and financial markets, investment logics, and global capital become increasingly entangled (Aalbers, 2008; Lees et al., 2008; Böhmer et al., 2025), highlights these processes as the driving force behind the systemic transformation of European housing systems and the growing inequality in housing outcomes (e.g. Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Rolnik, 2013; Fernandez and Aalbers, 2017)[1].

These systemic shifts are facilitated and accompanied by policy and regulatory reforms that have made contemporary housing systems increasingly prone to

[1] The processes of housing commodification and financialization, as well as their variations across different housing-welfare regimes, are examined in-depth and can be reviewed in the first deliverables produced in Work Packages 3 and 4 of EqualHouse, among other sources (Dewilde et al., 2025; Böhmer et al., 2025; Farha and Schwan, 2025; Waldron and Wijburg, 2026).

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reinforcing and perpetuating structural disparities between social groups. As a result, new and deepened forms of market failure have emerged in the provision of adequate, secure and affordable homes (Dewilde et al., 2025). This divergence of outcomes implies, on the one hand, a growing concentration of unmet housing needs and housing precarity among economically disadvantaged households (ibid). Renters, those living or wishing to live in urban centres, lower-income households, and younger individuals are experiencing heightened rent and cost burdens, over-indebtedness, and an increased risk of eviction, displacement, and exclusion from the housing market (ibid). On the other hand, there is an accumulation of residential assets and wealth among housing market "insiders"; namely those who own residential assets and benefit from their price inflation/appreciation and income generation (ibid).

Policy responses to this crisis cover a wide range of actions and are often fragmented and at times even contradictory in nature, as state interventions have often directly or indirectly reshaped housing systems to further concentrate, rather than redistribute, wealth and opportunity in European housing systems (e.g. Lawson and Miligan, 2007; Dewilde et al., 2025). Within market-oriented regimes, states are susceptible to adopting market logics at the expense of more inclusive, democratic, and collective solutions (Harvey, 2010; De Angelis, 2004, 2017). Accordingly, housing policies often directly or indirectly prioritize enabling households to access housing through the market rather than maintaining or expanding decommodified housing options. A prime example of this dynamic is state promotion of mortgaged pathways into homeownership through fiscal support in the form of tax relief on mortgage interest payments (Fatica and Prammer, 2018; Causa and Woloszko, 2020). This line of policy action has been proven to disproportionately benefit more advantaged households and, in some cases, through its adverse effects on house prices, decrease overall affordability (e.g. Rouwendal, 2007; OECD, 2022; Böhmer et al., 2025). Also less commodified forms of housing are affected by these trends. Social housing is the primary form of state-provided decommodified housing in Europe. However, several countries have or are witnessing a neoliberal shift in social housing policy, marked by the retrenchment and residualization of the social housing sector (e.g., Scanlon et al.,

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2014; Whitehead and Scanlon, 2007). Relative declines in supply and privatisation of social housing have led to a reduction in its overall market share, and access is increasingly restricted to the most disadvantaged, low-income, and vulnerable households (Hoekstra, 2017; Murie, 1997; Vincze, 2024). Additionally, social housing itself has shown to be vulnerable to direct impacts from commodification and financialization processes or being replaced as a policy tool by more market-oriented forms of state-subsidised housing (Angel, 2023; Aalbers, 2016; Whitehead, 2015; Byrne and Norris, 2022; Czischke, 2009).

While a well-established and extensive body of literature examines how commodification and financialization unfold across diverse housing regimes and contexts — including the policy and regulatory shifts that underpin them, and the associated deterioration in housing outcomes — a comparatively smaller, yet growing, strand of research focuses on identifying and analysing policies and actions that seek to contest or mitigate these structural drivers (Norris and Lawson, 2023; Waldron and Wijburg, 2025; Wijburg, 2021). This literature emphasizes that a decisive and comprehensive shift in housing policy across multiple levels of governance is needed to address the housing crisis. However, such a shift is hindered by entrenched structural limitations and the prevailing reluctance of states to disengage from market-driven logics that have long shaped European housing provision (Dewilde et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in search of solutions to this crisis, policymakers, housing practitioners, and researchers are more and more often looking beyond the “state/market duopoly”. This resurgence of interest in a wide array of collective, bottom-up, self-organised and collaborative housing models signals a simultaneous critique of and response to the failure of conventional housing provisioning systems to uphold the right to housing (Midheme and Moulaert, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2022).

Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition of a substantial unmet housing need “in between” market and social housing sectors (Blessing, 2015; Di Feliciantonio, 2017; Pósfai et al., 2022). This growing gap in affordable housing provision is the result of two compounding trends. On the one hand, a growing share of society is unable to access market-based housing solutions due to increasing rents and housing prices against a backdrop of stagnating wages

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(Fernandez and Aalbers, 2017; Fuller et al., 2020). On the other hand, residualised social housing stocks only cater to an ever more selective group of the socio-economically most vulnerable households. The housing needs of households left underserved by both market and state housing provisioning mechanisms, can be met by emerging alternative housing models and by the strengthening of a regulated rental or cooperative sector in countries where the latter already exists. In countries where a regulated affordable rental and cooperative sector does not exist (as is, for instance, the case for most countries in Southern and Central-Eastern Europe), a tenure diversification through the introduction of new and reshaped tenure arrangements is even more urgently needed to cater to the unmet needs of this growing group of households. There is also a strong argument developing for the state to shift its supportive mechanisms from market-based affordable housing provision to these alternative housing models and research has demonstrated that such partnerships are beneficial towards achieving the shared goals of improving access to housing and mitigating housing inequalities (Ferreri and Vidal, 2021; Lang and Stoeger, 2017).

2.1.2 Alternative housing models between and beyond the state/market duopoly

Beyond state-led and market-driven housing provision, as well as the hybrid forms that exist between these two, there exists a diverse and expanding domain of housing that can be classified as "alternative". Alternative forms of housing introduce and provide new roles for non-market and non-state actors and often realize a high level of autonomy and decision-making power for residents and core stakeholders to enjoy. However, they only rarely exist completely independent from the state/market institutions and actors. As such, the vast majority of alternative housing models involve varied and intricate (property) relations between state, market and civil society/community actors (Czischke, 2018; Ferreri and Vidal, 2021). This landscape of both conventional and alternative forms of housing, and the relative involvement of state, market and “third sector” actors is schematically represented in Figure 1. This Figure is a strong simplification of the actual institutional diversity of the housing models and categories represented. Their placement in this figure is merely indicative, given that some of these models

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and categories are used as broad labels that cover a wide variety of projects and the relative involvement of housing actors in a certain model can vary strongly across different projects and housing contexts.

The majority of academic and policy literature tends to conceptualize alternative housing through a focus on community-led or community-oriented models. Among these, collaborative housing has emerged as the most prominent umbrella term, particularly in European research contexts (Griffith et al., 2022), which is why this term will be employed here to refer to this (sub-) field of housing literature. Collaborative housing encompasses a subset of alternative housing models and initiatives where collaboration between residents and other stakeholders is central (Czischke et al., 2020). This subset includes a wide range of collective and self-organised housing models that are gaining traction across Europe and beyond, such as cohousing, cooperative housing, community land trust (CLT), self-help housing, and legally or non-legally recognised occupations (Fromm, 2012; Czischke, 2018; Czischke et al., 2020). In the next chapter, we will argue that literature based on the resident-centred perspective of collaborative housing largely overlooks the potential of initiatives driven by civil society and third sector actors, such as non-profit organisations and social movements. In these initiatives, it is those actors, rather than residents themselves, who initiate impactful alternative housing projects, often in cooperation with state actors (Ferreri and Vidal, 2021). The same can be said for state actors who can also be capable of establishing non-profit, experimental and alternative initiatives (e.g. Katsigiani et al., 2025). Thus, the scope of “alternative housing” represented on the graph below is broader than that of collaborative housing.

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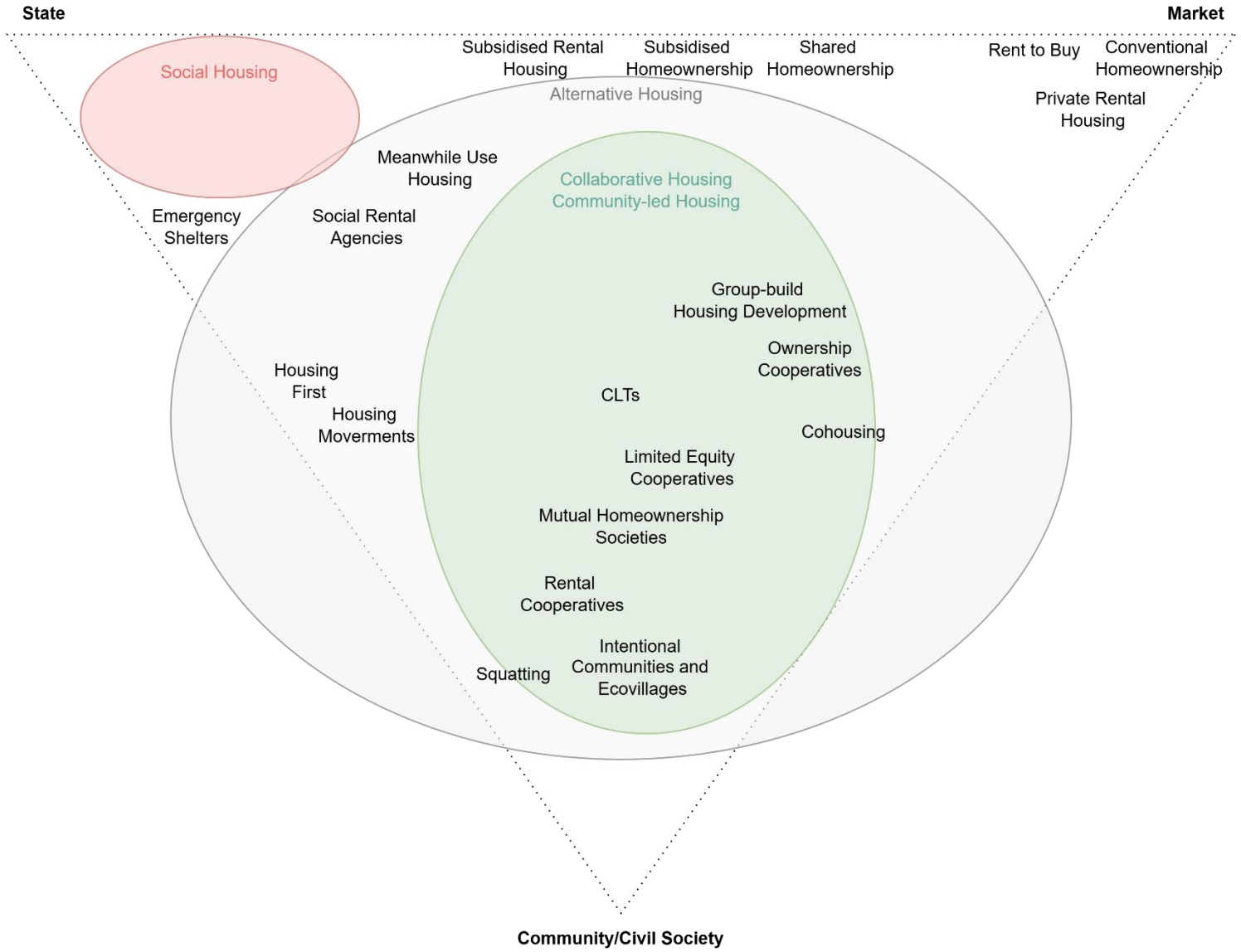

Figure 1: Situating alternative housing models based on differing levels of general engagement from state, market, and community/civil society actors

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2.2 Alternative Housing Practices as Levers for Housing Regime Shifts

The alternative housing models introduced above can respond to housing needs which are unmet by the state- and market-led housing provision. However, beyond directly serving the needs of residents, a better comprehension of the broader potential impact of such initiatives, calls for a more in-depth understanding of how the development of these models can influence housing systems in which they emerge and exist. This impact can be twofold. First, alternative housing models can develop and pioneer tenure arrangements that reshape how people access, develop, own and use housing, that did not previously exist in a given housing context. Second, they can develop, demonstrate and scale up the models and arrangements they introduce. This, in turn, can potentially influence their housing policy environment and incentivise mainstream and like-minded housing actors to shift or improve their practices as well.

2.2.1 Tenure as a key structural dimension of housing systems

Housing tenure is a key dimension for understanding how alternative housing models operate internally and interact within broader tenure structures (Bossuyt, 2022). Tenure types – owning and renting are the most prominent in European housing systems – are structural features of housing systems that dictate specific conditions of access and use and underpin power relations between households and other housing actors. Furthermore, tenure types are socially produced and contingent; their content and meaning are shaped by specific spatial, temporal, and institutional (especially legal and regulatory) contexts (Ruonavaara, 1993). Tenure arrangements, the specific institutionalised form tenure types take on in a given housing context, shape dimensions such as cost, financing, suitability, quality, and the "rules of access and exit ", that is, the conditions under which households can access, remain in, sell or leave a dwelling (Doling, 1999, p.158; Bossuyt, 2022). Therefore, as Dewilde et al. (2025) emphasize, tenure arrangements are far from neutral mechanisms. Housing systems encompass a set of social policies, regulations, and institutional arrangements that govern housing provision (Kemeny, 1992; Dewilde et al., 2025) and these systems shape the structure and

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implications of different tenure types, for instance, by favouring one type of tenure arrangement over another. How tenure is structured and organised within broader housing systems will shape what power relations emerge within and between different tenure arrangements, as well as how specific types of housing inequality are reproduced. The power dynamics between people regarding a specific tenure type – for example, the relationship between landlords and tenants – as such, are mediated and maintained by the wider housing systems in which tenure arrangements exist. These wider housing systems and their institutional frameworks have, in turn, historically been shaped by distinct regimes and ideological orientations, resulting in context-specific constellations of hegemonic tenures and mechanisms of access (Kemeny, 2001; Stephens, 2017). Thus, the ideological orientation behind housing systems is transmitted through its resulting tenure structure – understood here as the overall composition and hierarchy between different tenure types. This tenure structure and processes of tenure restructuring thereby shape housing outcomes in terms of what types of housing precariousness (and housing-based wealth accumulation) occur and among which social groups they are most prominent (Dewilde et al., 2025). In short, the rights and obligations allocated through different tenure types determine who can access housing, the conditions of access, and the degree of security and control.

To understand how alternative housing models can disrupt existing tenure structures and the control these structures exercise over access to housing pathways, it is first necessary to conceptualise tenure as both a product and reflection of power relations embedded within specific institutional contexts. A further implication of this conceptualisation is that a context-sensitive and specific approach is essential. While a housing crisis is unfolding on a European scale, there are structural differences in housing challenges and types of precariousness across different housing welfare regimes (e.g. Dewilde et al., 2025). In line with this, the nature of the needed tenure diversification is also dependent on the specific housing regime. Thus, in the design and use of our typology (more on this in Chapters 3 and 4), and in ongoing research within this work package (particularly the selection and analysis of case studies), we will remain context-sensitive.

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Alternative housing models introduce new and innovative tenure arrangements and thereby open up new housing pathways that can potentially disrupt the connection between tenure arrangements, associated power relations and market power at the household level. As a result, alternative housing models widen the spectrum of housing solutions, creating legal and financial arrangements that respond to a larger spectrum of housing needs than mainstream housing pathways. Specifically, this means that the introduction of one or more alternative housing models in a given housing system, will offer households more opportunities to secure long-term, affordable and adequate housing. For instance, in a rental cooperative residents only have to be able to pay an affordable monthly fee in order to have a secure long-term living space, while also committing to the collective values and governance of the project. In a limited equity cooperative or a community land trust residents make a smaller investment than what their individual dwelling would cost in the market, and still secure a long-term right-to-use of their apartment. In a social rental agency, a housing unit which would otherwise be rented under a more precarious and less affordable market-based rental contract, due to the specific arrangements of the agency, can be more affordable and secure. Essentially, alternative housing models introduce a great variety of different tenure arrangements, but many of them have in common that, by promoting a more equal and democratic distribution of access and power over housing resources between social groups, they improve the tenure conditions under which their target groups can access and use housing.

Beyond promoting a more equal distribution of resources, alternative housing models have also demonstrated an ability to use available resources more effectively and to draw in new resources which would otherwise not be available in a specific housing sector. For instance; the investments of members (financially, but also in terms of their own work and time), in-kind support, donations and friendly or interest-free loans coming from a supportive community around a housing project, or different forms of support from the public or private sector (such as land, financial resources and expertise)(Pósfai et al., 2022).

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2.2.2 The role of alternative housing models in housing regime shifts

Discourses and policy actions that attribute the housing crisis primarily to supply shortages and regulatory constraints proceed with addressing this crisis without questioning or challenging the underlying premises of the dominant housing regime (Heslop and Ormerod, 2019). These approaches continue to legitimize policies that favour deregulation, financialization, and the expansion of market-based housing provision and access, even when they arise in response to the negative consequences of these very processes (ibid). While their aim is – albeit temporarily – to stabilize housing markets and support financial systems, they simultaneously worsen housing affordability problems for those with less market power (ibid) and thus intensify, rather than mitigate, housing inequalities (Wetzstein, 2022). Figure 2 illustrates how a cycle emerges (arrow 1 in the figure) in which the crisis of the prevailing housing regime is not used to question its premises, but instead reinforces and legitimises them, ultimately renewing the crisis (Fikse and Aalbers, 2021; Heslop and Ormerod, 2019).

Alternative housing practices present a potential way of escaping this self-perpetuating cycle. These initiatives promote models and mechanisms that, at some level, organize the development and provision of housing independently of

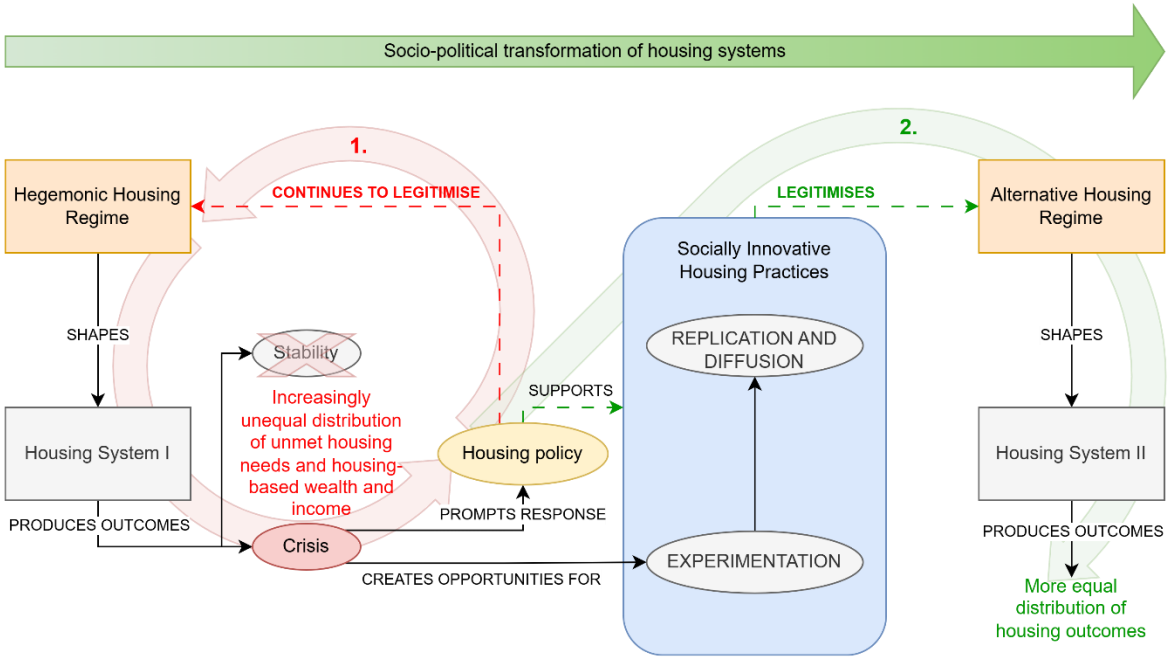

Figure 2: Role of alternative and socially innovative practices in the socio-political transformation of housing systems

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the market. A defining feature of many alternative housing models is the incorporation of legal and organisational measures designed to prevent or limit housing and land price speculation, such as resale price restrictions combined with collective or non-profit ownership structures through which land and housing resources are permanently locked in[2]. By actively constraining or rejecting speculative value capture, these models aim to ensure that initial affordability features are retained over time. This, in turn, enables such models to continue serving their intended target groups in the long term, rather than primarily generating one-off benefits for initial occupants and indirect benefits for property sellers.

When these less commodified housing forms demonstrate consistent performance in terms of affordability, stability, and inclusivity, they provide empirical and normative grounds for a shift away from the dominant housing regime towards a new paradigm (arrow 2 in Figure 2), which could include a significant decommodified housing sector beyond public ownership. While theoretical perspectives on such housing regime shifts often focus on exogenous shocks and instances of radical change as the main triggers of housing regime transformation, Bengtsson and Kohl (2020) argue that prolonged incremental changes to housing structures and institutions – be they progressive or regressive in nature – can be equally consequential in terms of long-term housing regime shifts. The underlying hypothesis (schematically represented in Figure 2) of this report and subsequent work in WP6 of the EqualHouse project is that the emergence, replication, diffusion, and potential institutionalisation of alternative housing models could therefore result in long-term changes in housing regimes, especially when backed by a supportive housing policy framework.

[2] This is a standard feature in most community land trusts and limited-equity cooperatives, as well as some mutual homeownership societies.

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2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the rise of alternative housing models within the broader context of deepening housing inequalities and the structural limitations of state- and market-led provision in Europe. It has shown that these models emerge not only as pragmatic responses to unmet housing needs, but also as practices that may challenge dominant institutional logics by diversifying tenure forms, redistributing access to housing resources, and fostering more democratic modes of provision. In doing so, they open up the possibility – albeit uneven and context-dependent – of incremental housing regime shifts.

At the same time, the analysis has underscored that alternative housing does not constitute a coherent or uniformly transformative field. Rather, the term "alternative" encompasses a wide range of models, projects, and practices, not all of which are oriented towards systemic change. Moreover, within market-oriented housing systems, alternative housing initiatives that seek to rely less on market actors and mechanisms remain structurally vulnerable. As argued by Savini and Bossuyt (2022), such projects risk being undermined through processes of marketisation (eroding their decommodified character), co-optation (weakening their autonomy and democratic governance), and marginalisation (limiting their inclusivity and accessibility). These pressures highlight the difficulty of sustaining transformative potential within institutional environments that continue to privilege commodified forms of housing provision.

This tension points to the need for a more precise analytical framework capable of distinguishing between initiatives that merely operate alongside the dominant system and those that possess the capacity to reconfigure it. To this end, the next chapter introduces the theoretical lens of social innovation, which allows us to assess how alternative housing practices generate, sustain, and scale transformative dynamics within specific institutional contexts. By focusing on the interplay between experimentation, institutional embedding, and broader systemic change, this framework provides the tools to evaluate which models are most likely to withstand external pressures and contribute to more durable shifts in housing regimes.

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Building on this, Chapter 4 applies the social innovation lens to empirically grounded cases of alternative housing across Europe, operationalizing the insights developed here into a typology that captures the diversity and transformative potential of these initiatives. Together, Chapters 3 and 4 aim to move beyond descriptive accounts of alternative housing towards a more systematic understanding of its role in reshaping housing systems.

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3 Social Innovation in Housing

Building on the account of the European housing crisis as a structural outcome of housing regimes, and alternative housing models as potential responses to this crisis presented in the preceding chapter, this chapter introduces social innovation as a conceptual and analytical framework for examining how some alternative housing initiatives manage not only to meet urgent housing needs, introduce new actors in housing governance system and promote more equal distribution and access to housing resources across social groups, but also trigger wider transformations of social relations and governance structures that shape housing provision. By linking the structural patterns identified in Chapter 2 with a theoretical understanding of the role of socially innovative housing initiatives in actively contributing to more democratic, equitable and solidarity-based housing systems, this chapter provides the conceptual foundation for Chapter 4. There, we develop and present a typology of socially innovative housing initiatives that operationalizes this social innovation framework to identify and distinguish between different types of socially innovative housing initiatives in order to provide an analytical starting point to assess their transformative potential, and understand how they can contribute to broader processes of housing regime change.

3.1 Social Innovation as a Theoretical Framework

Social innovation is a significant concept that describes the ability of groups within society to collectively envision alternative futures and respond to human needs during periods of social challenges and crises (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki, 2021). In this context, social innovation initiatives arise with the purpose of improving the living conditions of individuals who are affected by processes of social exclusion that have become increasingly visible in modern societies. These processes include issues such as poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, the human or physical decline of neighbourhoods, limited access to services, restricted opportunities and rights due to institutional or governance failures, the reduction of welfare support programmes, and the privatisation of

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public spaces and infrastructure (MacCallum et al., 2009; Garcia and Haddock, 2016).

Much of the literature on social innovation and community development identifies alternative or counter-hegemonic third-sector organisations – such as non-governmental and non-profit organisations, cooperatives, and social enterprises – as the main drivers and leaders of social innovation. These actors often challenge dominant policy approaches, employ resources in innovative ways to tackle inequalities, deprivation, marginalisation, and other crisis-related conditions, and propose alternative approaches for improving the circumstances of socially excluded individuals and communities that are not typically addressed by public or market institutions (Martinelli, 2013; Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018; Miquel et al., 2013; Cabré and Andrés, 2018). Consequently, a central and ongoing concern among both scholars and practitioners of social innovation is how to design alternative solutions that contribute to improving the human condition (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019).

Social innovation though, is not only about the satisfaction of basic needs hitherto neglected by the state or the market. It is also about changes in social relations between individuals and groups in neighbourhoods and the wider territories embedding them as well as the identification and confrontation of exclusionary mechanisms of contemporary policy arrangements and development paradigms (Weinzierl et al., 2016; MacCallum et al., 2009; Moulaert et al., 2005; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). In other words, social innovation is outcome-oriented; offering solutions to social problems, but also process-oriented; leading a development trajectory towards more democratic, egalitarian and solidarity-inspired cities (Parés et al., 2017; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki et al., 2022b; Paidakaki, 2021) through the transformation of governance mechanisms and the rearticulation of power relations (Miquel et al., 2013).

3.1.1 The three-pillar approach to social innovation

According to several scholars of social innovation (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Gerometta et al., 2005; Novy and Leubolt, 2005; Moulaert et al., 2005, 2013; Cabré and Andrés, 2018; Paidakaki, 2021), social innovation can be understood

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through three interrelated pillars, which ideally should operate in combination. Especially the third one is problematic, yet came into being in many cases we know (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019).

(1) The first concerns the fulfilment of genuine human needs – both material and immaterial, individual and collective – that have been neglected or intensified by state or market mechanisms. These needs may relate to issues such as housing, health, and food, but also to less tangible aspects including cultural values, education, visibility, recognition, and citizenship.

(2) The second pillar involves the development of new forms of social and institutional relationships among individuals and social groups. These new forms are built on the ethics of solidarity which include mutual aid, reciprocity, respectful communication and cooperation, and so on. For social innovation initiatives building social relations also involves the building of an inclusive, democratic governance system, in which the voice of all participants matters.

(3) This leads us to the third pillar, i.e. socio-political empowerment towards more targeted political participation with the ambition of transforming power relations in ways that promote broader inclusion in decision-making processes and a more equitable distribution of resources, thereby supporting the fulfilment of the aforementioned needs. Socio-political empowerment is also meant to trigger transformations in governance systems, e.g. by creating more open and democratic forms of bottom-linked governance in which local authorities enter in a co-learning process with democratic grassroot organisations (Garcia and Haddock, 2016; Paidakaki, 2021; Moulaert et al., 2013, 2022).

Social innovation therefore goes beyond merely identifying new or more effective ways to address visible social problems. Rather, it represents a form of transformative practice aimed at fostering a more just and democratically inclusive society (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). In essence, social innovation involves meeting previously unmet or alienated human needs through the transformation of social relations. These transformations contribute to improving governance systems that organise and regulate the distribution of goods and services intended

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to address such needs, while also creating new bottom-linked governance arrangements and organisations, such as forums for discussion, political decision-making structures, and allocation mechanisms (MacCallum, 2009).

3.1.2 Social innovation and bottom-linked governance

Within the framework of the three-pillar interpretation, social innovation and governance are closely interconnected, with "bottom-linked governance" emerging as a central concept in the literature on social innovation. This notion moves beyond the traditional divide between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to action and is considered a fundamental element in processes of social change and transition (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Moulaert et al., 2019; Paidakaki, 2021; Miquel et al., 2013). Bottom-linked governance is understood as a hybrid form of governance that brings together social innovation actors and institutional actors that enable social innovation, such as executive and administrative authorities, legislative bodies, elected representatives, foundations, and financial institutions (Swyngedouw and Jessop, 2006; Manganelli and Moulaert, 2018; Paidakaki, 2021; Miquel et al., 2013).

Actors involved in social innovation both contribute to and are supported by democratic forms of bottom-linked governance, which are shaped through organisational interactions occurring within and across different levels. Intra-level governance develops through horizontal collaboration among socially innovative or counter-hegemonic groups, as well as through the co-creation of endogenous institutional capital – such as alliances, advocacy or pressure groups, policy communities, coalitions, and federations – aimed at influencing policy- and decision-makers (Paidakaki et al., 2022b; Paidakaki, 2021; Paidakaki and Lang, 2021).

"Inter-level governance", by contrast, emerges from the interactions between socially innovative actors – either individually or in collaboration with their allies – and public or private institutions. This form of governance seeks to challenge ineffective or market-oriented governance arrangements by promoting solidarity-based alternatives, while also mobilising additional support and entitlements. Such support may take the form of policy reforms, tax incentives, programme

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experimentation, or alternative mechanisms of social funding that benefit socially innovative actors and the communities they serve (Paidakaki, 2021).

3.1.3 Social innovation is path-dependent and contextual

Identifying the institutional contexts in which social innovation may emerge – or, conversely, where it may be constrained – requires sensitive methodological approaches capable of examining when, where, and how governance processes with the potential to foster social innovation develop (González and Healey, 2005). Research further indicates that the specific forms, dynamics, and impacts of socially innovative initiatives are highly context-dependent, shaped by place-specific socio-economic structures and institutions, as well as by their historical trajectories (MacCallum et al., 2009).

Accordingly, social innovation should not be understood as a prescriptive or purely instrumental policy concept. Instead, it represents a robust idea grounded in both theoretical and empirical insights, one that acknowledges the historical, spatial, political, economic, social, and ecological particularities of the contexts in which it unfolds (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). In this sense, social innovation is path-dependent and contextual, meaning that the impact of innovative social practices can only be properly understood through a multi-scalar analysis that considers their historical and geographical foundations (Novy and Leubolt, 2005; Moulaert et al., 2007; Cabré and Andrés, 2018).

Consequently, country, regional, and also local characteristics must be taken into account when attempting to apply insights from one context to another (Cabré and Andrés, 2018). A similar consideration applies to the capacity of institutional relationships to work collectively towards the creation of more just and higher-quality living environments. Such governance practices evolve within specific historical and geographical settings, shaped by various synergies as well as by contradictions, conflicts, and active struggles (González and Healey, 2005). Institutional change therefore follows path-dependent trajectories, whether these are driven by hegemonic or counter-hegemonic forces (Moulaert et al., 2007).

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3.2 Social Innovation in Housing

3.2.1 The three-pillar approach to social innovation in housing

Having introduced social innovation as a general theoretical framework, we can now examine its analytical value in understanding alternative housing practices. As detailed in Chapter 2, contemporary European housing systems are a fertile terrain for alternative and, by extension, also socially innovative initiatives to emerge. When the concept of social innovation is applied to housing and in housing systems, it encompasses the following three dimensions:

(1) the satisfaction of housing needs through the provision of affordable, accessible and quality housing;

(2) the establishment and strengthening of solidarity-based social and institutional relations between individuals, social groups and housing actors in the governance of housing;

(3) the generation of institutional leverage and legitimacy in support of the formation and expansion of open, democratic, bottom-linked housing governance configurations (Moulaert et al., 2013; Parés, 2019; Paidakaki, 2021; De Weerdt and Garcia, 2016).

Following this reiteration of the three-pillar approach, social innovation in housing can be defined as the collaborative and bottom-linked processes aimed at satisfying housing needs in a manner that is new to the local context (Gruber and Lang, 2018; Paidakaki, 2021). In this framework, socially innovative housing actors engage in the development of bottom-linked governance structures in collaboration with other housing stakeholders, particularly decision- and policymakers. Their objectives include enhancing the housing conditions of vulnerable and disadvantaged households, improving access to and more efficient use of economic capital at their disposal, and informing the modus operandi, including policy (re)development, in affordable housing provision (Garcia and Haddock, 2016; Miquel et al., 2013; Cabré and Andrés, 2018; Fromm, 2012). Socially innovative housing initiatives predominantly provide small-scale housing solutions for low- and middle-income households located in areas facing specific socio-economic challenges. Beyond their direct role as housing providers, they

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frequently assume activist and watchdog roles in local housing and planning and policy-making processes. In doing so, they collaborate with a range of actors and stakeholders to defend and advance the right to housing, the right to the city, and broader principles of justice and equality within their local contexts. Through these activities, socially innovative housing actors mobilise their specialised expertise and political agency to contest and reshape dominant, market-oriented development trajectories (Paidakaki et al., 2022a).

3.2.2 A context-sensitive and process-oriented approach to alternative housing practices

As stated above, theorisations of social innovation emphasize that it is a highly path- and context-dependent process. Housing systems are complex, influenced by temporal and spatial factors, and embedded within broader social and economic systems (Stephens, 2011). Consequently, housing inequalities must be understood and addressed in relation to the temporally- and spatially-specific institutional and social dimensions of housing provision systems. In line with this observation, what is considered "innovative" in this report and in our subsequent case study selection and research is strongly contingent on the housing system in which a given initiative operates. For instance, a social housing agency may not be viewed as innovative in contexts where such organisations have a long-standing presence; however, in settings where owner-occupied housing constitutes around 90% of the total stock, these agencies act as agents of innovation by introducing and promoting more accessible and inclusive housing models. Accordingly, "socially innovative" is not to be understood as a binary label but as a context-dependent assessment, applied only where it meaningfully captures an initiative's role within its housing system.

In addition to requiring context-specific sensitivity and flexibility, identifying socially innovative practices involves more than assessing whether they improve housing outcomes. As explained in the previous section, social innovation places equal – if not more – attention on how those outcomes are achieved. This "process orientation" is supported by the second and third dimensions of social innovation and entails understanding the impact of socially innovative housing initiatives not

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just in terms of successfully addressing unmet human needs by providing affordable and accessible housing, but also in their confrontation with the structural conditions that left these needs unmet in the first place (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki, 2021). This confrontation and the potential for transformation it brings, involves the introduction and rearticulation of new social and institutional relations, particularly power relations. This, in turn, paves the way for the opening up and reconfiguration of context-specific housing trajectories for those excluded from dominant access to land through collective forms of tenure, ownership, governance and finance. Accordingly, social innovation theory is well suited for analysing how housing initiatives interact with, and potentially reshape, the institutional, legal and socio-political contexts in which they operate (Gruber and Lang, 2018), a matter which is to a certain extent left underexamined in existing typologies and larger-scale comparative work in alternative and collaborative housing research fields.

To support this shift in focus and aim, it is useful to conceptually distinguish socially innovative housing from collaborative housing and the wider alternative housing field, as schematically represented in Figure 3. While a growing body of research indicates that collaborative housing models can improve housing outcomes, particularly in terms of affordability, accessibility and autonomy, this positive impact is not always guaranteed. As Ferreri and Vidal (2021) observe, definitions of collaborative housing still include fully commodified housing models, such as owner-occupied or developer-led cohousing initiatives (Larsen, 2019). They also note that, while collaborative housing is conceptualised as being founded on substantial collaboration between residents themselves and external stakeholders, “In this framing, "collaboration " remains a suggestive notion that however says little about the material and power relations that underpin it” (Ferreri and Vidal, 2021, p. 7). Therefore, while many collaborative housing models promote values and strategies that address housing inequality (Gruber and Lang, 2018; Lang et al., 2018; Arroyo et al., 2022) and offer alternatives to the dominant state/market provisioning system (Ahedo et al., 2023; Balmer and Bernet, 2015), not all such initiatives can be considered socially innovative. As such, we seek to reconceptualise alternative housing models through the lens of social innovation to focus attention to models

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both within and outside of the framing of collaborative housing that address the structural conditions of housing production – specifically land acquisition and development, funding mechanisms, and tenure models (Jepma et al., 2025) – in order to reintroduce systems of access that shift housing away from value extraction and towards long-term non-speculative use (Balmer and Bernet, 2015). Figure 3 below highlights that socially innovative housing initiatives can be found beyond the boundaries of collaborative housing, and vice versa. This section argues that not all housing forms that can be deemed collaborative fit within the scope of socially innovative housing. The following section elaborates why some housing forms that are socially innovative do not fit within the framing of collaborative housing.

Our reconceptualization of alternative housing models allows for the inclusion of initiatives that initially offer only limited resident influence over decision-making or interaction with external stakeholders and are therefore often overlooked in the collaborative housing research field. Socially innovative housing practices often bring new actors and roles to the housing landscape, thereby expanding the range of possible interventions. One of these areas of intervention is aimed at serving social groups in systemically disempowered positions and with very limited social and economic means for self-organisation or -empowerment, such as (ex-)homeless people, refugees, individuals leaving institutional care, or those with specialised support needs. Housing models that aim to improve the housing conditions of these highly vulnerable target groups often require substantial resources and a high degree of professionalisation. To meet these demands, such models may initially offer only limited levels of resident agency in comparison to more self-organised alternative/socially innovative housing models. However, this does not prevent them from reorienting and reshaping market-driven or state-led institutional structures in ways that foster resident empowerment, enhance agency, and challenge existing power asymmetries within these niche housing sectors (Paidakaki et al., 2022b). Furthermore, many socially innovative housing initiatives add a new dimension to housing governance through the ways in which they engage with their target groups. This mode and intensity of engagement also distinguishes them from more traditional social housing actors. They often show a

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stronger commitment and sense of solidarity towards the populations they serve, which enables them to take a more proactive role in creating and sustaining opportunities and conditions for the social capital of these populations to influence the housing system. (Marshall et al., 2017; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Paidakaki et al., 2022b). Such engagement is expressed through a variety of actions and programmes, including addressing social problems that intersect with housing (such as labour-market reintegration or legal assistance), supporting the development of local civic and peer-support networks, and strengthening of practical and social skills (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Moulaert, 2000; Smith, 2008; Paidakaki et al., 2022b).

3.2.3 Positioning in the existing research landscape

The typology of alternative housing models proposed in this report is not the first typology or comparative framework on this subject matter. Bossuyt (2022) introduced a typology that differentiates between three ideal-typical property regimes in collaborative housing based on what property rights are held by whom. This approach views property regimes as products of ongoing contestations and negotiations and the typology itself demonstrates how property regimes are a key mediating variable for the positive outcomes associated with collaborative housing forms, especially accessibility and affordability (ibid). The typology developed by Griffith et al. (2022) is based on three key dimensions; (1) architecture of the estate, (2) institutional organisation of property rights and (3) collective values held by residents. They emphasise the pivotal role of the third dimension – a dynamic set of shared community values, including the extent to which initiators and stakeholders commit to and prioritise securing long-term affordability, accessibility and autonomy – in shaping the performance of collaborative housing initiatives. Jepma et al. (2024) build on this premise to demonstrate that commitment to social values influences the promotion and fulfilment of these values within

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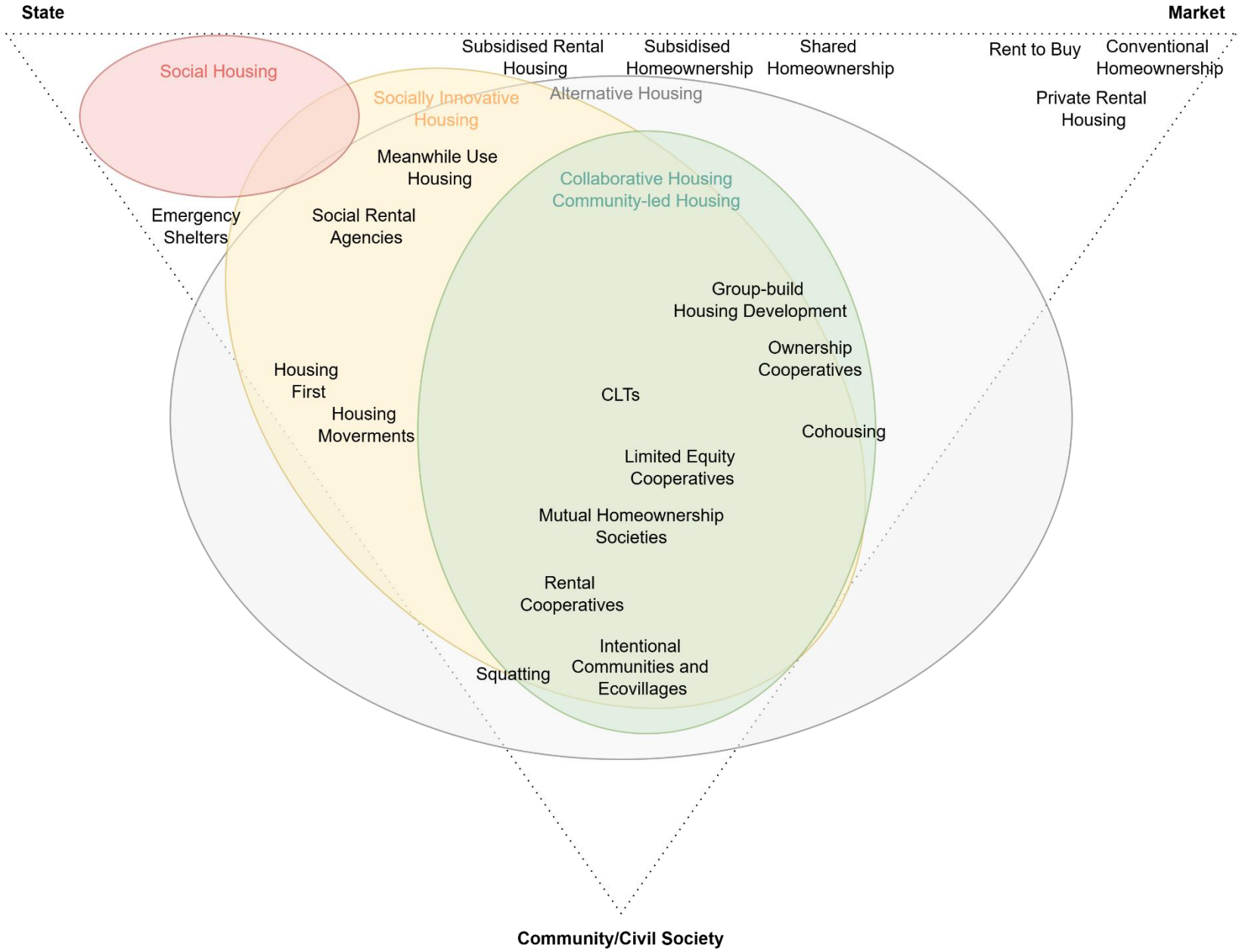

Figure 3: Situating socially innovative housing models in the alternative and collaborative housing research landscape

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within, and in tension with, institutional and regulatory environments. While acknowledging that trade-offs between these social values are inevitable, they argue that these trade-offs are contingent on, and shaped through the negotiations and contestations that take place between, on the one hand, community-held values and on the other, the institutional, regulatory, and policy context (ibid).

These existing comparative frameworks and typologies contribute key insights into what characteristics, actions and values on the side of alternative housing models shape their potential in addressing housing challenges. However, they by and large, neglect the transformative potential of socially innovative housing models, in terms of how these can be initiated, maintained and replicated to ultimately reshape housing systems both within and across different housing contexts. An exception is the work of Ferreri and Vidal (2021) who provide a noteworthy international comparative framework of public-cooperative housing policy areas and mechanisms. These include legal and policy tools states can engage to act as short- or long-term enabler in the production, accessibility and maintenance of (partially) decommodified and collectively self-governed housing forms. Yet, this framework, that encourages and enables an analysis of the interaction between government and cooperative actors and the policy mechanisms involved, is not a comparative framework of alternative or collaborative housing models as such.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced social innovation as a conceptual and analytical framework through which to examine how alternative housing initiatives can move beyond the provision of housing towards broader transformations in social relations and governance. By unpacking the three pillars of social innovation – meeting unmet needs, reconfiguring social relations, and reshaping governance structures – it has shown that the transformative potential of housing initiatives cannot be assessed solely in terms of outcomes, but must also be understood through the processes and institutional dynamics they set in motion. In this sense, social innovation provides a necessary lens to bridge the gap between the

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structural analysis of housing regimes and the empirical diversity of alternative housing practices.

Crucially, this chapter has argued that socially innovative housing should not be treated as a discrete or bounded category. Rather, it is best understood as a cross-cutting concept that may emerge across a wide range of alternative housing models and conceptual framings. What distinguishes socially innovative housing is not the model itself, but its capacity to foster more inclusive social relations, redistribute power, and collectively empower communities within specific institutional contexts. Conversely, when alternative housing initiatives cannot be framed as socially innovative, this is rarely because they fail to meet residents' needs. Instead, their limitations tend to lie in the extent to which they reproduce rather than transform existing social relations and governance structures.

This perspective reinforces the importance of adopting a context-sensitive and process-oriented approach. As the chapter has shown, socially innovative practices are inherently path-dependent and embedded in specific socio-institutional environments. Their capacity to challenge dominant housing regimes depends on how they navigate, negotiate, and potentially reconfigure existing institutional arrangements, including relations with state and market actors. This also implies that the same housing model may exhibit different degrees of social innovation across contexts, depending on how it engages with local power structures, governance configurations, and housing system dynamics.

Building on these insights, the next chapter develops a typology of socially innovative housing initiatives that operationalizes this framework. In doing so, it provides a tool to move beyond descriptive accounts of alternative housing and towards a more rigorous assessment of their transformative capacity within – and against – the constraints of existing housing regimes.

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4 Typology of Socially Innovative Housing Initiatives in Europe

4.1 Design Process and Purpose of the Typology

The typology presented in this chapter is designed to make better sense of the complex and heterogenous landscape of socially innovative housing initiatives in Europe. It aims to identify those initiatives that hold the greatest potential to deliver more socially just housing outcomes in relation to their housing context and to support an understanding of which models are capable of contributing to the socio-political transformation of European housing systems by challenging the dominant logics of the housing regimes that shape them. The typology will guide our selection of suitable case studies, which we will present in a future EqualHouse report. It also aims to support other housing scholars to situate their studies of particular initiatives within the larger world of socially innovative housing solutions. Finally, it serves as a framework for policymakers, NGOs and the housing initiatives themselves to understand not only the nature but also the opportunities and limitations of particular models.

This typology was designed following a primarily inductive approach. First, a set of selection criteria was established to identify initiatives that promote a socially innovative model of housing provision, taking specific housing contexts into account. A heterogeneous sample of 50 initiatives was then collected and mapped onto two dimensions that were selected because of their close alignment with the overall purpose of the typology: (1) capturing how and for whom initiatives realise access to housing, and (2) assessing how and to what extent they relate to dominant housing provisioning models. Plotting the sample initiatives across this two-dimensional graph informed the identification of five distinct ideal types; social mandate, prefigurative commons, collectivised rental, collectivised ownership and collaborative ownership (see below in Chapter 4.1.2, Figures 4 and 5). These ideal types do not capture the full complexity of real-world cases but are rather meant to reflect recurring normative and structural features that can be found across models that align with a given type. Finally, five key questions were formulated to differentiate between these ideal types, clarify their underlying

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structural and normative distinctions, and provide a transparent and replicable way to determine the ideal type with which a particular initiative most closely corresponds. The five questions that we use are structured in a flowchart (see below in Chapter 4.1.2, Figure 6) and are as follows:

1. What is the financial basis of resident participation in the project?
2. At what level do resident investments reduce housing costs in the financing structure of the housing project?
3. Which stakeholders hold decision-making power over structural and strategic decisions in the project?
4. What level of tenure security do residents have?
5. Do restrictions apply when residents sell (their share in) their home or can it be sold at market value?

The following sections cover the outcomes of each of these steps in the design process of the typology.

4.1.1 Identifying socially innovative housing initiatives

The typology developed in this study is intended to discern between socially innovative housing initiatives, models and projects, based on a number of key distinctions that can be drawn through this subset of alternative housing initiatives. To determine which types of housing initiatives were to be included in the sample group and can be subjected to this typological framework in its further use, four inclusion criteria were defined:

1. Initiatives are directly involved in or responsible for housing provision;
2. Initiatives operate on a non-profit basis and aim to provide access to housing at below-market costs;
3. Initiatives foster the emergence of new or restructured social relations between housing stakeholders and/or introduce new actors in the governance system of housing provision;
4. Initiatives adopt strategies that are, in principle, scalable within, and transferable across contexts, even if they currently operate at a local or small scale.

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While housing initiatives that meet these four criteria are not necessarily socially innovative (discerning this would require more in-depth, context-specific consideration), it seems reasonable to suggest that they are highly likely to foster and promote socially innovative practices. For the sake of simplicity, they will thus be referred to as socially innovative in the remainder of this report. The first criterion excludes organisations that solely fulfil an activist, advocacy, networking or supporting role without engaging in housing provision themselves. However, it is important to note that intermediary and supporting organisations are in many cases vital partners to initiatives directly involved in providing housing (Czischke, 2018) and are an important component to consider in answering some of the questions posed in this study. The second criterion ensures that only initiatives whose organisational logics, at least to some extent, actively diverge from conventional market-driven housing provision, are covered in the typology, while the third criterion selects for initiatives that introduce new tenure, financing, ownership and governance arrangements to materialize this aim. The final criterion is included to focus attention on initiatives with potential relevance beyond individual cases.

To assemble the sample group of socially innovative housing initiatives (see table 1 containing their full listing), an exploratory, non-systematic search strategy was followed. The aim was not to produce an exhaustive listing, but rather to achieve a degree of representativeness in terms of both geographical diversity and the range of different alternative housing models present across Europe. This search started by going over existing listings and collections from organisations and resources, including the European Responsible Housing Awards (ERHA, 2025), World Habitat Awards (World Habitat, 2026), Housing 2030 (Housing 2030, 2025) and the HouseInc Atlas of Housing Solutions (Saporito et al., 2025). This was done to include initiatives that had already received recognition for their social impact. This initial search was then complemented with a targeted search for initiatives from specific countries and regions, and for particular alternative and collaborative

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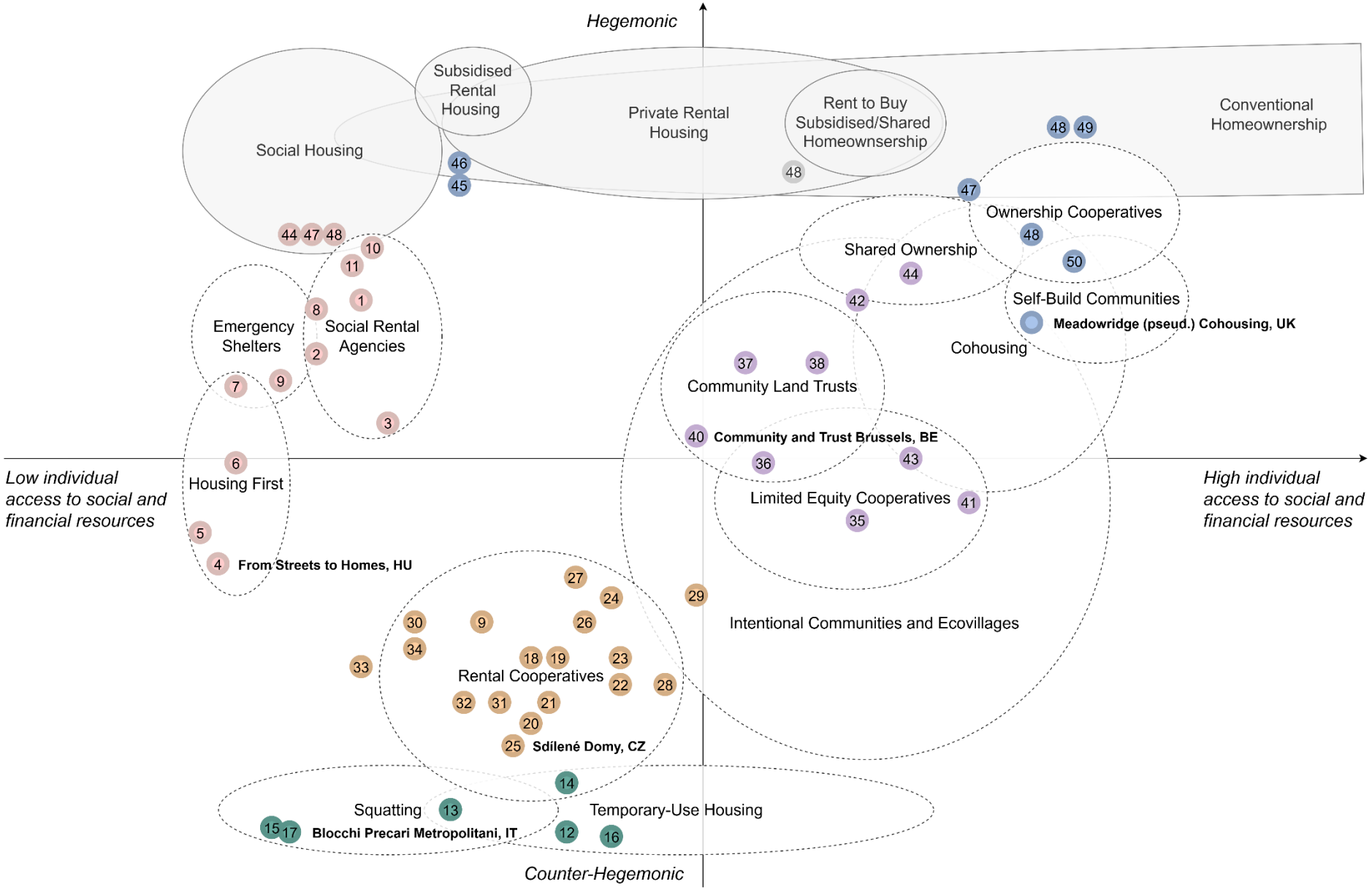

Figure 4: Mapping sample group of socially innovative housing initiatives along two dimensions - operationalisation of access on horizontal axis, ideological position on vertical axis. The list of mapped initiatives can be found in Table 1

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Table 1: Overview sample initiatives

#	Name	Location	#	Name	Location
1	Collectief Goed	Antwerp, Belgium	26	Mas Coop	Southwest France
2	Habitat	Barcelona, Spain	27	HabiTAT	Vienna, Austria
3	Casa Viva	Brussels, Belgium	28	Spreefeld Cooperative	Berlin, Germany
4	**From Streets to Homes**[3]	Budapest, Hungary	29	Ecoravie	Le Drôme, France
5	Canopy	Leeds, UK	30	Wohnungsgenossenschaft Am Beutelweg (WOGEBE)	Trier, Germany
6	Housing First	Lyon, France	31	Las Carolinas	Madrid, Spain
7	TANDEM project	Parma, Italy	32	De Torteltuin	Amsterdam, The Netherlands
8	STOPA	Slovakia	33	Autorecupero Cohousing Le Torri	Firenze, Italy
9	DAR=CASA (Hybrid - 2[4])	Milan, Italy	34	Iewan - Strowijk	Nijmegen, The Netherlands
10	SRA Housing Thessaloniki	Thessaloniki, Greece	35	Skotland Plads Cooperative Housing	Copenhagen, Denmark
11	Senior Cohousing Apartments Rybnik	Rybnic, Poland	36	Cork Community Land Trust + Upcycling Trust	Cork, Ireland
12	Communa	Brussels, Belgium	37	Terra Noe	Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France
13	Spazio di Mutuo Soccorso	Milan, Italy	38	La Coop Foncière	Paris, France
14	Stad in de Maak	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	39	OFS Plaine Commune	Plaine, France
15	Metropoliz	Rome, Italy	**40**	**Community Land Trust Brussels**	Brussels, Belgium
16	PLACE/Ladywell	London, UK	41	Wooncoop	Belgium
17	**Blocchi Precari Metropolitani**	Rome, Italy	42	LILAC	Leeds, UK
18	Sostre Cívic	Barcelona, Spain	43	Jätkäsaari Kiertotalouskortteli	Helsinki, Finland
19	La Borda	Barcelona, Spain	44	Bridgeport Cohousing (Hybrid - 2)	Dorset, UK
20	Zugló Collective House Association (ZCHA)	Budapest, Hungary	45	Project Building Hope	Rankovce, Slovakia
21	Mietshäuser Syndikat	Germany	46	CODE Housing	Bulgaria
22	Hastings Commons	Hastings, UK	47	The Threshold Centre Cohousing (Hybrid - 2)	Dorset, UK
23	Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust	Liverpool, UK	48	Residential Area Kirchhof St. Nikolaus (Hybrid - 4)	Freiburg, Germany
24	Chamarel Association	Lyon, France	49	QBUS	Düsseldorf, Germany
25	**Sdílené Domy**	Prague, Czech Republic	50	Trudeslund Cohousing	Copenhagen, Denmark

[3] The initiatives marked in bold are presented and discussed in detail at the end of this chapter, starting p. 63. These models are representative for the ideal type they belong to.

[4] This housing initiative is a hybrid model that combines two ideal types

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housing models discussed in the literature, including housing cooperatives, collective self-build groups, cohousing initiatives, intentional communities, Community Land Trusts, housing occupations and Housing First initiatives.

4.1.2 Mapping the socially innovative housing landscape across two dimensions

Each initiative in the sample was positioned along two analytical dimensions (Figure 4). These dimensions reflect, respectively, what socio-economic target group the initiative serves based on how access to housing is operationalised (horizontal axis) and how the initiative relates to dominant housing regime logics (vertical axis). Mapping the sample initiatives along those axis, allow us to identify patterns across cases and to ultimately distinguish the ideal-types developed later in this chapter (Figure 5).

The horizontal axis, ranging from low to high individual access to social and financial resources, captures the extent to which socially innovative housing initiatives target and accommodate different resident groups. Socially innovative housing initiatives always, implicitly or explicitly, serve a certain target population and the diversity of this group varies depending on (1) how access is operationalised within a particular housing model; and (2) the wider housing context in which the initiative emerges. For instance, some socially innovative housing initiatives target households with incomes that are too high to qualify for social housing or receive priority on waiting lists, but too low to secure adequate housing on the private market (see also Chapter 2). Consequently, initiatives situated towards the centre of this axis often apply dual income criteria, setting both a lower income threshold (frequently aligned with the lower or upper eligibility limit for social housing) and an upper income threshold, sometimes supplemented by additional wealth/income-related requirements, such as restrictions on owning other habitable property. Towards the right side of the axis, income criteria tend to become more implicit, as these models may not set specific minimum income thresholds, but require substantial financial capacity from residents, for instance by requiring them to finance (part of) the project or housing unit they will be living in, or to pay a more substantial monthly cost. To summarise,

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the inclusivity of a socially innovative housing initiative is shaped by how access is operationalised and enforced within the model, making implicit or explicit access criteria a central mechanism through which different forms of social innovation position themselves within the broader housing landscape.

The vertical axis positions socially innovative housing initiatives according to the extent to which their mechanisms and dynamics of housing provision reproduce or challenge dominant housing logics and the inequalities these tend to reinforce. To provide reference, hegemonic or mainstream housing tenure types are placed along the top side of the graph (and vary along the horizontal axis, in relation to socio-economic parameters of their general target group). Their relative position makes it possible to discern that socially innovative housing initiatives do not act as alternatives to the entire landscape of dominant housing forms, but rather only to those that (fail to) serve their shared socio-economic target group. This observation puts tenure, again, at the centre of our analysis, as the potential of alternative housing initiatives to open up new housing pathways must be understood in relation to housing regime-specific tenure structures, and the distribution of power and housing resources they underpin, both within (intra) and across (inter) different tenure arrangements.

It is important to note that one of the limitations of socially innovative housing initiatives is that even if inequalities are mediated within a specific socially innovative tenure model, inter-tenure power imbalances may persist. For instance, in welfare systems where the ability to secure basic human needs is increasingly dependant on owning a property that can appreciate in value (see for instance the literature on asset-based welfare (e.g. Doling and Ronald, 2010) and the role of intergenerational housing wealth as a precondition for securing access to housing for future generations (e.g. Arundel and Hochstenbach, 2020)), socially innovative housing models that do not allow for investment appreciation, keep residents at a relative disadvantage to "full" homeowners. As such, the introduction of new and hybrid tenure arrangements alone cannot, by itself, mitigate inter-tenure housing inequalities. As Dewilde and colleagues (2025) emphasise, this would require policy-led, system-wide tenure restructuring. Additionally, Figure 4 supports the notion that the margin in which social innovation in housing emerges, expands

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when state and market housing provision fails to meet the needs of new target groups. As varying types of housing precariousness increasingly affect higher income levels, this opens up new opportunities for social innovation that distance themselves further from dominant provisioning models.

Initiatives situated closer to the hegemonic end of the vertical axis adhere more closely to the norms underpinning dominant housing regimes: market-based exchange and allocation, top-down state provision, individualised ownership, and developer-led commissioning. Those closer to the counter-hegemonic end actively contest or reimagine these norms through alternative governance arrangements, decommodified access mechanisms and development processes, and financing models that minimise the role of market actors such as commercial real-estate developers and banks. This dimension therefore connects directly to an initiative's transformative potential: its ability to democratise governance and access, to embed solidarity-based rather than market-oriented logics in housing systems, and to shape new housing pathways that minimise or mitigate the impact of commodification and financialization on housing provision.

Figure 5 introduces the five ideal types that make up the typology presented here. The transition from Figure 4 to 5 illustrates that these ideal types overlap and intersect with existing terminology used to refer to different alternative housing models. As with any typology, the ideal-types presented here are simplified constructs, not existing empirical forms (Kuckartz, 1991; Bossuyt, 2022). These five ideal types are defined based on questions (presented in Figure 6, discussed in more detail in the following section) that only allow for binary answers, while in reality, these questions require much more nuanced and complex answers. The resulting ideal types are meant to represent types of initiatives that share common structural and normative configurations that can be observed across the broader landscape of socially innovative housing. Real-world initiatives are often hybrids that can combine elements of multiple ideal types or shift between ideal types over time in response to changing capacities and contexts. The existence of apparent

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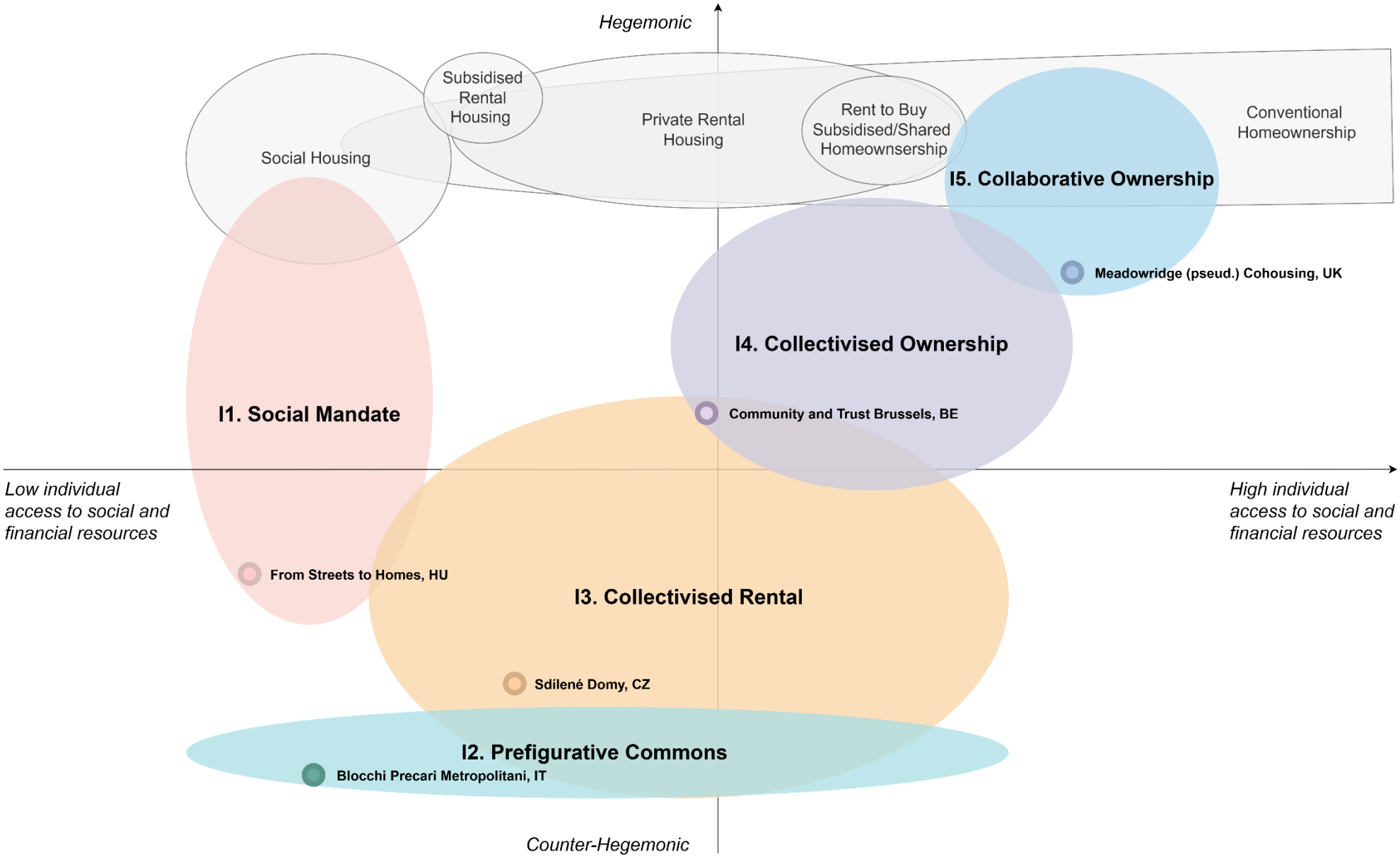

Figure 5: Mapping socially innovative housing ideal types along two dimensions; operationalisation of access on horizontal axis, ideological position on vertical axis

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outliers[5], cross-type and hybrid initiatives[6], as such, does not undermine the typology or its purpose: to provide a structured, transparent way of navigating diversity while preserving the distinctions that are most indicative for understanding socially innovative housing models and their transformative potential.

4.2 Dividing the Socially Innovative Housing Landscape into Five Ideal Types

The flowchart in Figure 6 illustrates how the typology is made up of five sequential questions. These questions are applied in a fixed order, with only the first question relevant to all initiatives and each subsequent question applicable only to the subset of models that meet the criteria of the previous one. Together, they can guide users through the decision process that determines which of the five ideal-types an initiative most closely aligns with. At the end of this section, each of the five ideal types is illustrated with an example initiative. While the typology itself and its key questions remain rather abstract, the questions presented below can be applied to real-world initiatives to identify which ideal-type they correspond to. These examples demonstrate how the identifying features of each ideal type can be observed in practice and how the typology can be used as a tool to interpret the diversity of initiatives in this field.

4.2.1 Questions 1 and 2: Logic of Access

The first two questions in this typology establish a central distinction between the first three ideal types, which operate according to a "logic" that is more closely aligned with private and social rental tenure arrangements, and the final two ideal

[5] For instance, initiatives "Project Building Hope" and "CODE Housing" (numbers 45 and 46 in Figure 4) are socially innovative housing models and they are included in the Collaborative Ownership ideal type, because they promote or improve access to affordable homeownership. However they do this for socially and economically severely disadvantaged households and therefore serve a different target group than most other initiatives in this ideal type, which is why they fall outside the graphic representation of Ideal type 5 (in Figure 5).

[6] For instance, the "Threshold Centre Cohousing" initiative (number 47 in Figure 4) is a mixed tenure model initiative that combines leasehold-based, private homeownership and social housing provision.

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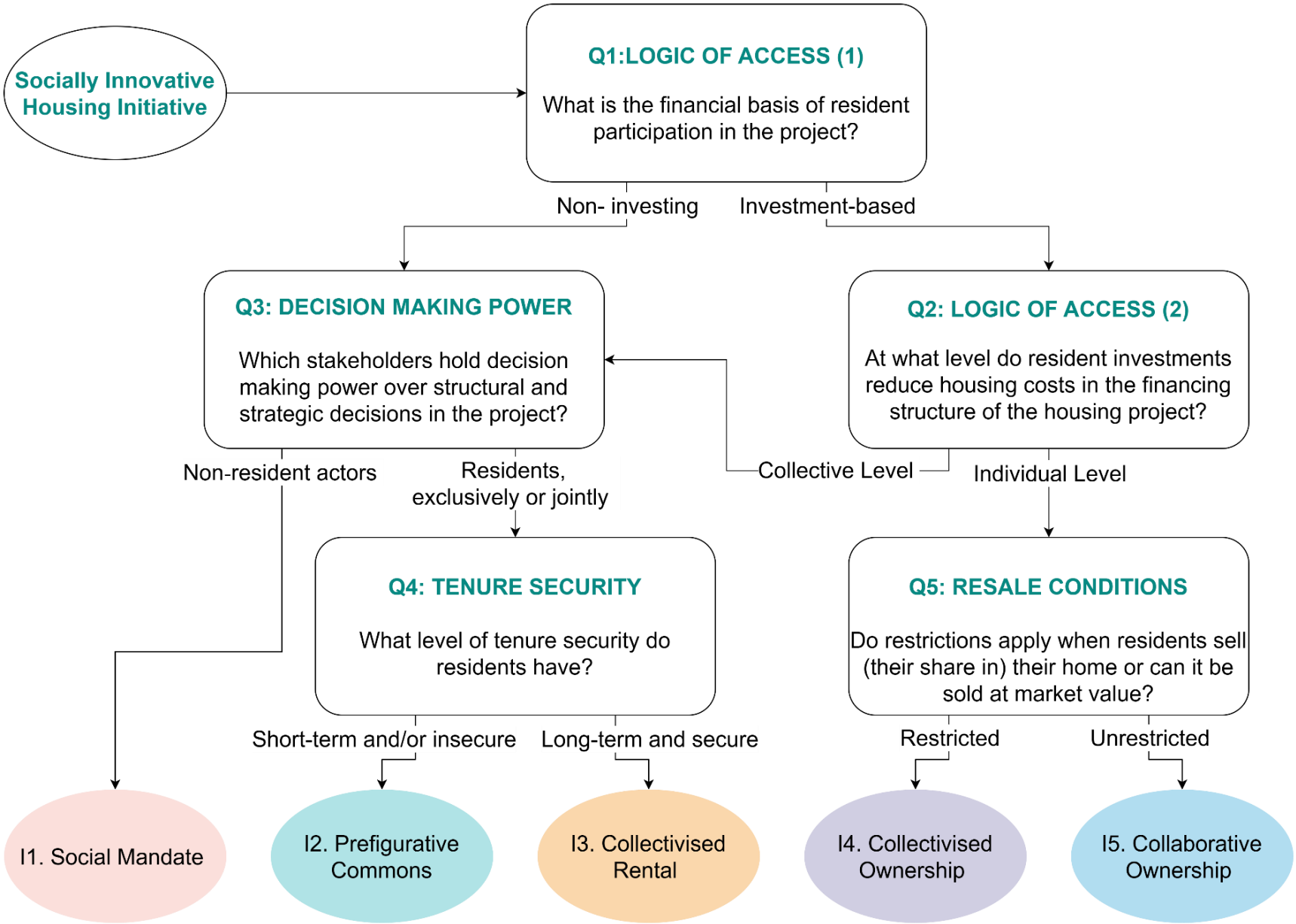

Figure 6: Flowchart of differentiating questions and the five socially innovative housing ideal types

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types, whose logic is more closely aligned with private ownership. A distinction between these two "logics of access" (explained in more detail below), as reflected in the mechanisms and dynamics the model contains, is made by examining first whether residents are required to make an individual financial investment to access the housing model, and second, how housing initiatives channel residents' financial participation – if present – into individual or collective financial and legal structures, and how this in turn shapes access, affordability and the distribution of value and rights across different households. The following paragraphs will explore these first two questions in more detail and consider their implications for the models in question.

Q1 - What is the financial basis of resident participation in the project?

This first question asks whether residents are required to make an individual financial investment in order to access housing through this housing model, or if models operate without such economic requirements or thresholds. This investment can take on many shapes depending on the housing model in question. For instance, in limited-equity and ownership cooperatives residents buy shares in the cooperative. These shares can be bought all at once or models can accommodate that residents build up their number of shares (and corresponding investment) over time. Even in rental cooperatives it is quite common that residents are required to buy a minimum share in the cooperative, for instance before they are included on their waiting lists. Investment can also take on an arrangement more typical for housing, where the investment corresponds directly with (partial) ownership of a housing unit, financed through a mortgage if necessary. In other models, no investment is required, as residents, from the onset, strictly pay "rent" and do not recover any capital when they leave the project. Q1 first sorts out those socially innovative housing initiatives that do not ask, or even accommodate, residents to make financial investments. Initiatives with financial models that require residents to pay only monthly rent, lease payments, or cost-covering fees, generally do not favour more financially secure households in terms of how housing costs are distributed across households, and in fact are more likely do the opposite and scale housing costs based on household income or dwelling

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size. Therefore, these initiatives can be found in the first three ideal types of this typology (three most left in Figure 6). However, there are a number of models that are complex hybrids of traditional owning and rental tenure types. And some of these initiatives, that do accommodate or require households to invest, also manage to subvert the inequality reinforcing dynamics typically associated with investment-based "ownership" housing models. These models are sorted out by Q2, and redirected to the first three “rental” ideal types.

Q2 - At what level do resident investments reduce housing costs in the financing structure of the housing project?

The second question asks whether, when individual household investments are part of the financing model of the initiative, this investment lowers overall housing costs, i.e. all costs that are associated with accessing a housing unit and are not “retractable” as investments, at the individual or collective level. The aim of this second “logic of access” question is to direct housing models based on whether they, to some degree, recreate the "cumulative advantage” (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006; Dewilde et al., 2025) associated with private homeownership[7] for households with relatively more market power. In initiatives where households do invest individually- whether upfront or periodic, through equity, shares, deposits, or similar instruments – these contributions can either (1) lower the long-term housing cost specifically for the investing household, or (2) be pooled to collectively support affordability for all households in the project. This distinction exposes different “logics of access,” meaning the underlying rationale and mechanisms through which a housing model transforms resident participation (including financial investment) into the right to live there. Conceptually, the first logic aligns more closely, as mentioned earlier, with the underlying rationale of “owning” and the rights that – through legal systems – are commonly associated with owning, while the second closer resembles a “rental” logic. Yet models adhering to either logic of access can produce alternative forms of housing that depart in meaningful ways from these hegemonic tenure forms.

[7] Households with the economic capacity to become homeowners are, under certain circumstances, able to leverage that advantage and secure access to housing at a lower net housing costs as they benefit from housing asset inflation (see also Dewilde et al., 2025).

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Under the first logic (when the answer to Q2 is ”individual level”), individual financial investment directly secures access for the investing household alone. The total amount that has to or can be invested is tied to a specific housing unit over which the household has an ownership or right-of-use claim, and access is organised through individualised financial arrangements that align long-term housing costs with the household’s own capacity to invest in the project. For example, with the community land trust ownership model, a household “owns” its unit through a leasehold interest, while land is held in collective ownership. Individual households typically cover the cost of that unit by financing it upon entering the project. Households with more savings can pay a larger share of this cost upfront, while households with less economic power need to take out a (larger and/or longer) mortgage and pay it off over time, resulting in different long-term net housing costs given the increased cost of interest payments. Both households ultimately contribute financially, but their contribution only counts towards their own private ownership share, not to the collective ownership share – the land.

Under the second logic (the answer to Q2 is “collective level”), residents’ investments do not directly reduce the cost burden on the individual household-such as by lowering individual monthly rent-like or mortgage payments – but instead improve collective affordability. Access is secured and mediated collectively and not through individual ownership claims or stakes, ensuring that both more and less financially secure households benefit equally and that less secure households are not relatively disadvantaged. For instance, in a rental cooperative, households with higher savings may purchase more cooperative shares at entry, while households with less economic power may not be able to do so. In this model, all households, however, pay the same monthly housing costs, giving households with lower initial savings the opportunity (but not necessarily the obligation) to buy shares over time, ultimately levelling out the number of owned shares between households. If all households were forced into the same financial arrangement within the project, either more well-off households would not provide the capital invested in the project at the onset, which for example, can enable the cooperative to obtain a bank loan for the remaining costs on more favourable terms, or less financially well-off households would need to seek

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individual financing, driving up their individual housing costs. As such, in this model, allowing for individually varying financial arrangements results in a lowering of collective housing costs, whereby all current and future households benefit equally.

The structural difference that supports these two logics is whether financing occurs at least partially at the level of the individual household or entirely at the level of the collective. When financing is organised individually, the differentiated cost distribution associated with mortgaged homeownership is reproduced within the initiative: households with lower incomes, fewer savings, or more precarious employment must typically finance under more expensive conditions. They may rely on higher-interest loans, longer repayment periods, or may not even meet lending requirements, therefore constricting their access to decent housing or increasing their long-term housing costs relative to more financially secure households who can contribute more capital upfront or access more favourable loan conditions. Even without involvement of an external, private financing partner (most commonly a bank) these dynamics can be recreated within the model itself. For instance, in a limited equity cooperative, ownership shares can be bought on the onset and/or over time and monthly costs are set at levels relative to the number of owned shares. As such, unless measures are in place to correct for this (see for example the rental cooperative discussed in the previous paragraph), households that are able to acquire a larger amount of shares upon entering the project will have lower overall costs, even though no formal loan was ever granted. In contrast, when financing occurs at the collective level, the financial capacities of all residents – both accumulated savings when joining and capacities to generate income after joining – are pooled and strategically leveraged to obtain better private or public financing conditions or, when no financing is needed, keep the project financially sound over time. The result is a more efficient use of available capital: the collective can secure lower-cost loans, reduce the need for private loans taken out by individual households, and thereby lower the overall cost of the project.

These structural differences also interrelate with a normative difference between the two logics, as it results not only in lower overall costs, but also in how

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those costs are distributed among participants, as the examples above show. Models that rely on individual-level financing and therefore share more "DNA" with traditional homeownership, implicitly import some of the inequality-reinforcing dynamics of mortgaged homeownership, where households' differentiated financial capacities shape the costs they ultimately bear to secure their access to housing. Even in an otherwise socially oriented and innovative project, adhering to this first logic ties housing affordability to the financial resources that are available at the household-level, thereby reproducing – possibly in moderated form (see question 4) – the socio-economic exclusion and stratification mechanisms embedded in conventional ownership models (ref. WP3). The second logic neutralizes this dynamic: by centralizing financing at the collective level, it turns the differentiated financial capacities and participation of households in the project into a solidarity mechanism rather than a source of inequality. Wealthier households' higher upfront contributions strengthen the collective's financial position, lowering costs for all, while less financially secure households gain secure and more cost-effective access without being indirectly penalised for their limited upfront investment capacity. In doing so, collective-level financing not only avoids reproducing the inequities of individual ownership but also offers a generally lower-cost alternative to traditional private homeownership for all participants, regardless of their financial position. As such, this logic encourages and relies on solidarity, but not altruism.

Having established that the capacity of socially innovative housing initiatives to mediate inequality hinges, in part, on this divergence in "logic of access", it is important to note that choosing to implement one logic over another will only have a significant impact on housing outcomes when the target group's economic background is diverse. If the target group is initially defined by narrow income criteria, this distinction becomes inconsequential as the relative advantages and disadvantages between households will be minor. The reason why this – in some cases arbitrary – question still takes a central place in this typology is because one of the key concerns in this study is the scalability of these models. This distinction becomes increasingly relevant as initiatives scale up, as this potentially involves broadening their target groups. Furthermore, in contexts where housing

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precariousness and affordability challenges are spreading into segments of the population that were previously more economically secure, interest from more socio-economically heterogeneous households in socially innovative housing initiatives, especially those that promote hybrid tenure arrangements, is to be expected. As on the one hand, housing initiatives themselves increase in scale and on the other, the socio-economic background of households interested in these housing arrangements diversifies, this distinction in logic, as it is set out here, will become increasingly relevant. This is because the implications of these underlying logics in terms of intra tenure inequality will diverge more sharply: "logic 2" models intentionally leverage the socio-economic diversity of their target group to strengthen the financial stability and viability of the project and structurally promote a more inclusive, efficient and equality reinforcing distribution of resources between participating households, whereas "logic 1" households are structurally less able to do this.

4.2.2 Question 3: Decision-Making Power

Q3 - Which stakeholders hold decision-making power over structural and strategic decisions in the project?

The third question applies only to those initiatives that, following questions 1 and 2, rely exclusively on external funding and financing or when they collectively pool financial resources to secure access to housing also ensure that all residents benefit equally from sharing those resources, regardless of whether they were contributed individually or collectively (see flowchart in Figure 6). The following question in turn examines the degree of direct democracy in the project by looking at how decision-making power over structural and strategic aspects of the project – such as, commissioning, design, management, maintenance, expansion and the reallocation of units – is distributed among stakeholders, and to what extent decision-making power is shared equally and without select privileges attached to, for instance, expertise or resource contributions, between residents and other initiative stakeholders.

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A more democratic housing governance approach introduces new socio-political relations that diverge from producer-consumer dynamics that characterise conventional multi-unit housing development (Jarvis, 2015). When residents gain a "seat at the table", they can shift from being service recipients to (co-)producers. This creates the opportunity to tailor the outcome of the housing development process more closely to the needs and preferences of residents and ensure that homes are developed with a greater emphasis on their suitability to be used and to support local community development, than on maximising profit (ibid.). However, while resident participation creates opportunities for empowerment, it does not guarantee it. Likewise, (semi)professionalised, non-profit commissioning and management can impede resident self-empowerment but does not fully preclude it, and can under certain conditions even strengthen it (Oosterlynck et al., 2019; Czischke, 2018). Furthermore, existing research on collective and collaborative forms of housing also warns that unchecked resident control can result in exclusionary dynamics such as gatekeeping, unequal participation, and short-term self-interests overriding solidarity aims, ultimately leading to market capture (Sørvoll and Bengtsson, 2020; Card, 2020). Conversely, governance led by professionalised or external actors can be vital to effectively promote the social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups, formation of "common interest" coalitions to influence policy and navigate complex financial, legal, and regulatory environments; or even hostile policy environment (Bresson and Labit, 2020; Szüdi and Kováčová, 2016; Bossuyt, 2022). Governance arrangements in which residents hold more direct decision-making power, as well as those in which their influence is more indirect, therefore contain distinct opportunities and pitfalls, requiring mechanisms to safeguard that power remains dispersed and in-check (Sørvoll and Bengtsson, 2020; Savini and Bossuyt, 2022). This dimension underpins the typological distinction between the "Social Mandate" ideal type and two others – "Prefigurative Commons" and "Collectivised Rental" – based on how decision-making power is allocated within the initiative, particularly to residents. In Social Mandate models, residents are generally not the commissioning party and are often not included in strategic and structural decisions early on in the establishment of the initiative, such as site selection,

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development contracting, determining financial structures, mechanisms and allocation criteria, selecting project partners and the distribution of (veto) voting rights on future decisions. These decisions are then made by non-resident, intermediary actors such as municipal housing companies, housing associations, non-profit organisations, welfare agencies, and existing sister cooperatives or land trusts. Once the project is established, residents may contribute actively to day-to-day or operational tasks but typically in participatory rather than directing roles. In these governance arrangements, residents are in a sense not regarded as governance peers, but rather governed for or with (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019; Moulaert et al., 2022), at least in the initial stages – this may change as the project develops and residents' role may change. By contrast, Prefigurative Commons and Collectivised Rental models involve higher levels of self-governance, self-determination and direct democracy, with residents holding a leading role or taking on structural management together with partner actors. In these initiatives, governance takes place through residents themselves (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019; Moulaert et al., 2022). This is also why only initiatives adhering to the latter two ideal types are most often included in collaborative or self-organised housing literatures, while Social Mandate initiatives are not. We view and include Social Mandate initiatives as socially innovative housing solutions, because in the theoretical framework of social innovation, transformative potential is not reducible to and dependant on resident self-organisation and -governance alone. For highly excluded groups with a structurally limited capacity to self-organise, socially innovative outcomes often depend on intermediary actors that negotiate and organise access to housing on their behalf, and build bottom-linked governance arrangements capable of influencing mainstream provision. In this sense, the Social Mandate ideal type captures intermediary-driven socially innovative practices that are analytically and policy-relevant, particularly in contexts where public provision is largely absent, residualised, or inaccessible for the target groups in question, and where meeting residents' needs hinges on opening new, and to some degree institutionalised, pathways into housing through partnerships between intermediary organisations and public and market actors.

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4.2.3 Question 4: Tenure Security

Q4 - Do residents have secure and long-term use rights?

The fourth question distinguishes socially innovative housing initiatives based on the security and duration of residents' use rights. Whereas the previous questions focused on the financial and governance side of how housing is accessed within a certain model, this question aims to capture the temporal stability of that access and the degree to which initiatives are embedded in, or isolated from, the legal and institutional structures of the wider housing system.

At one side of this divide are "prefigurative commons" initiatives that lack long-term or legally secure use rights. These forms of housing provision rely on short-term, precarious, or informal access to land or buildings that are underused or left vacant. Although uncertainty and short-term nature can go hand in hand in this type of initiatives, many of them have either guaranteed access for relatively short periods (a few years) thanks to formalised management or use agreements with local authorities or property-owners (e.g. for instance the *anti-kraak* (Eng. anti-squatting) or meanwhile use models in The Netherlands and the UK, respectively). In other cases, initiatives can, often through activism, retain access to the same site for longer periods of time (a few decades or indefinite periods) despite a trans-legal or legally uncertain status, for instance, through regular squatting. Yet, their uncertain and/or temporary nature can be a narrow and even misleading characterisation, as many of such initiatives display a remarkable capacity for continuity through relocation and replication strategies (Calzati et al., 2022) that ensure that when access to a specific site is lost, the community of residents can transition to a new site. This produces a form of "permanent temporariness" (Ferreri et al., 2016) in which stability is achieved not through tenure security of a single site but through the group's capacity to continuously mobilise underused or vacant properties. Regardless of their legal status, these initiatives challenge dominant housing logics by reappropriating spaces left underused by market and state actors, thereby highlighting the contradictory cooccurrence of widespread vacancy and severe forms of housing deprivation, such as homelessness, within contemporary European housing regimes.

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At the other side of this divide are “collectivised rental” initiatives that secure long-term and stable use rights through, for instance, collective, individual or cooperative legal ownership rights, long-term leasehold agreements, or hybrid legal arrangements. These initiatives provide legally secure and sustainable solutions that manage to disentangle (perceived) security and stability of tenure and private property ownership – the only tenure type for which this is traditionally reserved (Acolin, 2020). They offer forms of access that manage to combine long-term security and stability with collective and democratic governance practices, and, in doing so, challenge the fundamental assumptions in mainstream housing systems that have led to the supremacy of private homeownership. By ensuring that residents can remain in place over time without relying on the legal and financial arrangements that turn housing into a vehicle for individual wealth accumulation, such models propose viable alternative tenure arrangements, especially within property-centric housing regimes.

Together, these two positions represent fundamentally different strategies for realising socially innovative housing. Prefigurative Commons initiatives rely on more informal and adaptive forms of collective self-organisation, allowing groups to reappropriate and transform spaces to serve their collective needs (Calzati et al., 2022). Whereas Collectivised Rental initiatives rely on a more institutionalised, or at least institutionally recognised and enforced, form that anchors alternative housing models within housing systems while still resisting its dominant dynamics of commodification.

4.2.4 Question 5: Resale Conditions

Q5 - Can residents sell (their share in) their home at market value?

The fifth question only applies to initiatives that, as identified in questions 1 and 2, organise access to housing, at least in part, through individualised financial investment, with that investment benefiting residents at an individual level. This question further distinguishes between those initiatives based on whether residents hold unrestricted individual income rights (the right to sell and gain income or profit from their housing unit). Initiatives that restrict income rights,

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referred to as “collectivised ownership” initiatives, do not allow residents to sell their ownership claim or share freely through the market and include an anti-speculative or speculation-limiting clause built into their legal ownership or use arrangements. Models without restrictions on resale prices or conditions, referred to as “collaborative ownership” initiatives, are thus speculative in nature.

This distinction reflects whether an increase in a property's exchange value is privatised, flowing back to individual households, or distributed according to rules and mechanisms that balance private interests with long-term collective access. In the former case, housing redistribution occurs fully through the market (fully commodified). In the latter case, housing is redistributed through predetermined allocation criteria combined with price-setting rules, caps or resale formulas that allow for some individual value capture – for example, by adjusting for inflation or indexing appreciation to the local real estate market – while still limiting house price appreciation to a certain extent (partially decommodified). This balance ultimately determines an initiative’s capacity to maintain affordability and access for its original socio-economic target group over time. Therefore, collaborative ownership initiatives and models that do not limit speculation are significantly disadvantaged in their ability to achieve this.

While the provision and redistribution of housing remain marketized in collaborative ownership models, these initiatives can still be regarded as socially innovative in other areas of housing provision because they often significantly enhance the social and use value of housing they provide. For instance, in the German *baugruppe* (Eng. self-build groups) model, the development of multi-unit housing sites is oriented away from the market through a practice of collective group-build housing development. In this model, a group of future residents comes together before construction to jointly plan, finance, and commission their buildings. Unlike conventional, developer-led housing projects, baugruppen are co-developed by future residents, who collectively determine the building’s design, spatial configuration, shared facilities and sustainability features through a consensus-based process (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). This resident-led development process typically results in more cost-efficient and use-centred outcomes (ibid.). However, once completed, baugruppen can transition into

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various legal ownership forms. One of the possible legal structures that baugruppen adopt resembles or is identical to a conventional condominium, where individual units are privately owned and can be sold on the open market. While the benefits of user-driven and use-oriented design still endure in such cases, the initial cost-reducing potential of the model is largely negated once founding members begin selling their units. Thus, although the development phase of this model is characterised by the sidelining of profit-oriented market actors, this decommodified character tends to dissipate after completion, unless legal, financial, or ownership mechanisms are put in place to safeguard it.

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4.2.5 Ideal-types in practice: 5 socially innovative housing initiatives

Having distinguished the five ideal types, this section illustrates how they appear in practice through five representative cases.

I1. Social Mandate Ideal Type	**From Streets to Homes Association (FSHA) Utcáról Lakásba Egyesület (ULE)**
Location *Timeframe* *Scale*	Budapest, Hungary Established in 2012, first residents in 2013 250+ current residents across multiple programs (housing first – exiting homelessness, refugees, key workers, youths exiting state care)
Socially innovative practices	The From Streets to Homes Association (FSHA) creates new pathways into stable housing in a context where existing state and market mechanisms systematically fail people experiencing homelessness. In Hungary, rough sleeping is criminalised and shelters offer only temporary and often inadequate services (FSHA, 2021). Meanwhile, public housing is extremely scarce and private rents remain inaccessible to low-income groups, leaving many households with no dignified or viable housing options (ibid). FSHA provides a response to this homelessness crisis and has also started up additional programs that tailor to other gaps in the Hungarian housing landscape (ibid). With the cooperation of local governments, they repurpose unused and dilapidated municipal flats, collaborating with volunteers and tenants to renovate them into affordable rental homes. In addition, they operate a social housing agency that enables access to private rentals at reduced rates for key workers and a housing programme for refugees from Ukraine and other countries. Beyond housing provision, FSHA transforms the relationship between service/housing providers and beneficiaries through participatory renovation practices, and an intensive social work and peer-mentoring programme aimed at strengthening trust, social reintegration and self-determination of residents (FSHA, 2025; ERHA, 2025). The work of FSHA also extends into housing advocacy, challenging punitive homelessness policies and pioneering a Housing First approach in a system that offers almost no statutory pathways out of homelessness (FSHA, 2025). These combined efforts demonstrate how FSHA introduces new practices, relationships, and models of housing provision that reshape established responses to homelessness and housing precariousness in the Hungarian housing landscape.

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I2. Prefigurative Commons Ideal Type	**Blocchi Precari Metropolitani (BPM)**
Location *Timeframe* *Scale*	Rome, Italy Established in 2007 200+ households across multiple occupied buildings
Socially innovative practices	The Blocchi Precari Metropolitani (BPM) is one of Rome's housing movement organisations behind the collective occupation, self-management and transformation of vacant buildings into inhabitable spaces. In a city where a large share of both the private and public urban property stock is left vacant, BPM and allied housing-rights movements have reappropriated and repurposed disused properties (e.g. Metropoliz and Porto Fluviale sites), converting them through collective renovation into family housing and alternative cultural infrastructures (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018). With over 12000 people living in approximately 100 squatted buildings in Rome, BPM is part of a larger "right to housing" movement that, through squatting, not only seeks to meet urgent housing needs, but also to prefigure "urban commons" as autonomous infrastructures that support the emergence and dissemination of alternative and non-marketised forms of social reproduction (ibid). BPM's occupations are materialisations of a more democratic and solidarity-based housing form that meets urgent housing needs while also influencing mainstream discourse and policymaking on housing rights (De Leone and La Forgia, 2007). While BPM and wider "right-to-housing" activism in Rome was initially spearheaded by a demand of social housing for all households that couldn't afford to buy or rent on the private market, faced with a reality drifting further away from this goal rather than towards it, their activism progressively reoriented towards demanding a political environment that would accommodate market excluded households to keep living in the city under the grassroots and autonomous preconditions enacted by the occupation and reappropriation of vacant buildings. The contestation of urban segregation and exclusion through the practice of squatting have made extreme forms of housing precariousness a more pressing and acknowledged issue in this political and legislative context (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018; Di Feliciantino, 2017). At the regional level, their activism has resulted in some level of recognition of squatting and self-renovation of vacant urban spaces as effective, bottom-up responses to widespread housing deprivation, rather than merely illegal activities (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018). However, households living in these "sites of resistance" face the structural precarity and insecurity of looming eviction and the repressive legislation that denies residents of squats access to basic welfare and utility services (ibid).

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I3. Collectivised Rental Ideal Type	**Shared House** **Sdílené Domy**
Location *Timeframe* *Scale*	Prague and Děčín, Czech Republic Established in 2015, realisation first project in 2021-2022 30+ residents across four residential projects
Socially innovative practices	The Sdílené Domy cooperative in Prague creates collectively governed and permanently affordable rental housing. Their pilot project called "the first swallow" is a social cooperative, where housing is held in permanently shared ownership (Sdílené Domy, 2025). As part of their efforts to support expansion and replication of their affordable rental housing model, they designed a replicable legal structure and are open to emerging social housing cooperatives joining their network. In addition, they are one of the pilot projects and a member of MOBA Housing SCE, a network organisation of pioneering housing cooperative initiatives (operating in the right-to-use or rental cooperative approach) in the Central and South-Eastern European region. The core activity of MOBA is to create an internal revolving fund which will be available to member organisations for the initial phase of cooperative projects. Besides this, MOBA is also active in fostering knowledge exchange among members, advocacy on the European and local levels. Sdílené Domy also works in close collaboration with the German Mietshäusersyndikat (and are part of their international membership), whom their cooperative and ownership structure is modelled after (ibid). Sdílené Domy, as an umbrella organisation, is in a phase of expansion, besides the two projects in Prague and one in Děčín, they also recently welcomed a project from the area of Brno and will soon incorporate a fifth project. They are also actively advising a number of starting initiatives across the Czech Republic. In terms of governance, the projects within Sdílené Domy work on a horizontal basis, with strong member participation. The financing of each project is individual: the first project in Prague received a loan from a German foundation, while the second project was financed through member contributions and direct loans. Sdílené Domy is currently actively working on establishing contacts with banks to provide a more widely applicable financing mechanism for future projects.

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I4. Collectivised Ownership Ideal Type	**Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB)**
Location *Timeframe* *Scale*	Brussels, Belgium Established in 2012, realisation of first two projects in 2014-2017 130 households
Socially innovative practices	CLTB is a pioneering housing initiative that, with its establishment, was first to introduce the Community Land Trust model in continental Europe. CLTB is modelled after regular (ownership[8]) community land trust in that the model promotes a horizontal split in ownership between land, which is held in collective ownership, and buildings, which are (re)sold to residents at a capped price. As such, the model ensures that the homes remain accessible and affordable for its current target group. The CLTB model of housing provision has introduced two innovative features to the Belgian housing context (1) the institutionalisation of the indefinite collective ownership of land and (2) a more inclusive and democratic decision-making process in affordable housing governance (Aernouts and Ryckewaert, 2018). The ownership arrangement promoted by CLTB ensures that land is permanently decommodified and available for collective use by current and future generations of residents. Residents secure access to their individual homes through a long-term lease arrangement and are responsible for covering the cost of buying their house (which is on average 40% lower than the private market) and paying a relatively low "rent" for the use of the land (CLTB, 2025). Residents are individually responsible for financing their purchase of the house, and because the target group of CLTB are low-income households, this in most cases involves taking on a mortgage. The governance model of CLTB, like the ownership structure, is also modelled after a classic CLT concept: a tripartite governance structure, where membership in the governing body of CLTB is equally divided between (1) residents, (2) neighbours and civil society actors and (3) public interest or government actors. This equal distribution ensures that the interests of each of these groups are represented in the decision-making process (CLTB, 2025). Furthermore CLTB takes on an active role in promoting the CLT and other socially innovative housing models in Belgium and across Europe. In this role, they are closely involved in the establishment of two other CLTs in Belgium and a member of network organisations such as the European Community Land Trust Network. Among other national and international projects, they are part of the NWE Interreg "Upcycling Trust" pilot project that aims to establish and promote a socially inclusive housing energy transition model (NWE Interreg, 2025).

[8] As opposed to CLTs that offer rental housing, as is common in the UK. Rental CLTs would not be included in the Collectivised Ownership, but in the Collectivised Rental ideal-type (this distinction is explained in section 4.2.1.). Some CLTs offer both options and would thus be ideal-type hybrids.

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I5. Collaborative Ownership Ideal Type	**Meadowridge[9] Cohousing**
Location *Timeframe* *Scale*	UK Established in 2019 23 households
Socially innovative practices	Meadowridge Cohousing is a suburban intentional community and cohousing initiative. The project is self-funded by residents and residents privately own their homes. The residents that established this project were involved in its design process and the group of residents have control over decision-making and community life (how the community operates and the selection of new members). Part of the social value of this initiative lies in its integrated approach to meeting the housing and care needs of its aging residents. In traditional housing provision systems, seniors face significant barriers in securing their housing and care needs and are often only able to choose between housing options that either offer too much autonomy or too little. West et al. (2025) found that the care model, where residents commit to mutual support and autonomy through self-governance, practiced in this, and similar, self-organised cohousing communities, presents a viable alternative or complementary care model to traditional family or formal social care arrangements. The physical and social architecture (shared indoor and outdoor spaces facilitate spontaneous interaction, community activities and shared meals) help cultivate the supportive relationships and community norms necessary to sustain this mutual support model (Izuhara et al., 2025). This model of mutual support can take on an important bridging role between individuals and formal (social) care services and family members. As such, this initiative promotes a housing model that improves the agency of residents as they transition through life stages and, to a certain extent, supports and complements practices of aging-in-place (West, 2025). In demonstrating how self-organized, resident-controlled communities can enhance agency, foster meaningful relationships, and complement (though not replace) formal care arrangements, this initiative contributes an innovative model on how to approach meeting aging, housing, and care needs of aging residents.

[9] This is a pseudonym used to refer to a real-world case. The work by Izuhara et al. (2025) and West et al. (2025) referenced to describe this case make use of this pseudonymisation, as such, we adhere to it here as well.

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4.3 Conclusion

This chapter set out to develop a typology capable of navigating the heterogeneity of socially innovative housing initiatives in Europe while remaining attentive to their transformative potential. Building on the conceptual foundations established in Chapters 2 and 3, the typology reorients the analysis of alternative housing models away from descriptive categorisation alone and towards a more analytical understanding of how such initiatives intervene in, reproduce, or challenge dominant housing regime logics.

At its core, the typology demonstrates that not all alternative or collaborative housing initiatives are socially innovative in ways that meaningfully address structural housing inequalities. By introducing a clear set of inclusion criteria – focusing on non-profit provision, below-market access, reconfigured social relations, and potential for scalability – it delineates a subset of initiatives that are most relevant for analysing pathways towards more equitable housing systems. This already constitutes a first conceptual contribution: shifting the focus from what alternative housing is to what alternative housing does in relation to systemic transformation.

The typology's analytical strength lies in the explicit criteria used to distinguish between different types. By mapping initiatives along two core dimensions – (1) how access to housing is operationalised across socio-economic groups, and (2) how initiatives relate to dominant housing logics – it captures both distributive and structural aspects of housing provision. These dimensions are further operationalised through five guiding questions, which together provide a transparent and replicable framework for classification. In particular, the distinction between different "logics of access" (investment versus non-investment based, and individual versus collective), the allocation of decision-making power, the degree of tenure security, and the regulation of resale conditions emerge as critical variables shaping both the inclusivity and transformative capacity of housing initiatives. These criteria move beyond surface-level characteristics and instead foreground the underlying financial, legal, and governance structures through which housing outcomes are produced.

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Applying this framework results in five ideal-typical forms of socially innovative housing: social mandate, prefigurative commons, collectivised rental, collectivised ownership, and collaborative ownership. While these types are necessarily simplified and do not capture the full complexity or hybridity of empirical cases, they reflect recurring configurations of structural and normative features observed across the European housing landscape – and potentially beyond. Importantly, the typology does not position these types hierarchically, but rather highlights the different ways in which each engages with, and potentially transforms, existing housing systems. Some types, such as prefigurative commons, derive their transformative potential from contestation and experimentation outside institutional frameworks, while others, such as collectivised rental or ownership, seek to embed alternative logics within more stable and scalable institutional arrangements.

The relevance of this typology extends beyond academic classification. For researchers, it provides a structured lens through which to situate individual case studies and to compare initiatives across diverse contexts. For policymakers and practitioners, it offers a diagnostic tool to better understand the opportunities and limitations of different models, particularly in terms of their capacity to deliver long-term affordability, inclusivity, and systemic impact. By making explicit the trade-offs and conditions associated with different configurations, the typology can inform more targeted policy support and strategic development of socially innovative housing.

Ultimately, the key conceptual contribution of this chapter lies in linking the micro-level design of housing initiatives to their macro-level transformative potential. By foregrounding how access, governance, tenure, and value distribution are organised within different models, the typology provides a bridge between the study of alternative housing practices and broader debates on housing regime transformation. In doing so, it offers not only a tool for classification, but also a framework for understanding how socially innovative housing can contribute – incrementally yet meaningfully – to reshaping European housing systems towards more socially inclusive outcomes.

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5 Discussion and Conclusion

This report set out to bring greater conceptual clarity to the fragmented field of alternative and collaborative housing by developing a typology of socially innovative housing initiatives grounded in a social innovation framework. Across the preceding chapters, we have argued that the contemporary European housing crisis is best understood as a structural outcome of deepening housing inequalities, shaped by the limitations and contradictions of the prevailing state/market duopoly. Within this context, alternative housing initiatives emerge not only as pragmatic responses to unmet needs, but also as potential sites of socio-political transformation. The contribution of this report lies in advancing a more systematic understanding of how such initiatives can be analysed, compared, and ultimately assessed in terms of their capacity to reshape housing systems.

5.1 Social Innovation, Housing Initiatives and Housing Inequality

At the core of this report is the intersection between social innovation, alternative housing initiatives, and housing inequality. By adopting a political economy perspective, the report has framed housing inequality as a relational process – one in which the advantage of some groups is directly linked to the disadvantage of others. Within this context, socially innovative housing initiatives can be understood as interventions that seek to disrupt these dynamics in three distinctive manners.

First, these initiatives introduce new actors into housing provisioning systems, particularly from civil society, including cooperatives, community groups, and non-profit organisations. This diversification challenges the dominance of state and market actors and opens up new spaces for participation and agency in housing provision. In doing so, it also expands the range of knowledge, resources, and capacities that can be mobilised to address housing needs.

Second, socially innovative housing initiatives contribute to the redistribution of housing resources. This occurs not only through the provision of below-market housing, but also through the development of alternative financial and tenure

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arrangements that decouple access to housing from individual market power. By reconfiguring how land, capital, and housing assets are mobilised and allocated, these initiatives broaden access to housing for groups excluded from conventional pathways.

Third, and more fundamentally, these initiatives have the potential to transform inequality-reinforcing power relations embedded in housing systems. Through mechanisms such as collective ownership, participatory governance, and bottom-linked institutional arrangements, they redistribute decision-making power and challenge hierarchical relations between landlords, tenants, developers, and the state. This reconfiguration of social relations is a defining feature of social innovation and a key pathway through which more inclusive and democratic housing systems can emerge.

Taken together, these dynamics can lead to more just and equitable housing outcomes, particularly in terms of affordability, accessibility, and security of tenure. However, as the report has consistently emphasised, such outcomes are neither automatic nor uniform. The extent to which initiatives achieve these outcomes depends on how they are embedded within, and interact with, their specific institutional contexts. Furthermore, it should be noted that these models, due to their grassroots nature, often operate at a small and occasionally hyperlocal scale –many alternative housing projects start off with only a handful of housing units in a single neighbourhood or even building. As such, in many EU countries their role within housing systems is currently close to negligible. This is also a result of the economic and institutional framework in which these initiatives are embedded, and which they seek to address. The emergence and existence of more counter-hegemonic alternative housing initiatives is in itself a challenge to the existing status quo in the field of housing. Alternative housing models can have an important contribution especially in contexts where different decommodified, affordable housing solutions only marginally exist. In these contexts, the example they prove can push broader institutional changes. Since in many contexts, the emergence of alternative housing models is a relatively recent phenomenon, any assertions on whether their scale, and as a consequence their impact, will remain limited is yet to be seen.

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Finally, and most ambitiously, socially innovative housing initiatives hold the potential to reshape housing systems through broader socio-political transformation. This transformation is typically incremental and uneven, occurring through processes of experimentation, replication, and institutionalisation. While many initiatives remain small-scale or vulnerable to co-optation and market pressures, others demonstrate how alternative logics of housing provision can gain legitimacy and influence policy and practice. In this sense, socially innovative housing should be understood not as a marginal phenomenon, but as part of a wider process of contestation and transformation within European housing regimes.

5.2 Theoretical Framework and the Role of the Typology

A central contribution of this report is the integration of a social innovation framework into the study of alternative housing practices. This framework, structured around the three pillars of (1) meeting unmet needs, (2) reconfiguring social relations, and (3) transforming governance structures, has enabled a shift from descriptive accounts of housing models towards a more analytical and process-oriented understanding of their transformative potential.

Importantly, this framework emphasises that social innovation is not a static attribute but a context-dependent and processual phenomenon. The transformative potential of housing initiatives lies not only in what they deliver, but in how they evolve, interact with institutions, and influence broader systems over time. This process-orientation is particularly important in housing research, where the institutional and regulatory environment plays a decisive role in shaping outcomes.

Within this theoretical perspective, the typology developed in this report serves a specific and carefully delimited purpose. It does not, in itself, measure or determine the socio-political transformative potential of housing initiatives. Rather, it provides a structured analytical tool that allows researchers and practitioners to identify, classify, and compare initiatives based on key structural and normative characteristics.

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More specifically, the typology distinguishes between five ideal-typical forms of socially innovative housing: (1) social mandate, (2) prefigurative commons, (3) collectivised rental, (4) collectivised ownership, and (5) collaborative ownership. These types reflect recurring configurations of how access to housing is organised through particular sets of tenure arrangements. These innovative tenure types in turn reflect the diversity of how initiatives relate to dominant housing regime logics, and how governance, decision-making power, and value distribution are structured. Socially innovative housing models move beyond dominant ownership and rental tenure arrangements, and through the diversity of new and innovative tenure forms they represent, these models also demonstrate how access to housing can be diversified to serve the needs of a wider range of social groups. While these categories are necessarily simplified abstractions, they provide a coherent framework for navigating the diversity of real-world initiatives, which often combine elements of multiple types or evolve over time.

By focusing on dimensions such as access to housing, relations to dominant housing logics, governance structures, tenure arrangements, and value distribution, the typology captures the conditions under which transformative potential may emerge across these five types. For instance, some types – such as prefigurative commons – tend to derive their transformative potential from experimentation and contestation outside dominant institutional frameworks, while others – such as collectivised rental or collectivised ownership – may be better positioned to achieve institutional embedding and scalability. Social mandate models often operate through closer alignment with public objectives, whereas collaborative ownership reflects hybrid configurations that combine individual and collective logics.

In this sense, the typology is best understood as an enabling framework: one that supports the identification of different pathways through which socially innovative housing initiatives can engage with, reproduce, or challenge existing housing systems. It is particularly well suited for research that seeks to assess and explain processes of socio-political transformation in housing systems, precisely because it makes visible the structural and normative differences that shape these trajectories. Compared to existing typologies, the framework developed here offers

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a more explicit connection between micro-level design features and macro-level system change. It thereby contributes to the literature by providing a tool for comparison, that is also analytically attuned to questions of inequality, power, and transformation.

5.3 Applications of the Typology

Beyond its conceptual contributions, the typology has several important practical and research-oriented applications.

5.3.1 Application in Future Research within this Project

Within the context of this work package, the typology provides a clear foundation for case study selection and comparative research design. By distinguishing between five ideal types, it enables the systematic selection of cases that either share key characteristics or represent contrasting approaches.

This facilitates more advanced comparative analysis, allowing researchers to examine how different configurations of access, governance, and tenure shape outcomes across contexts. It also supports the identification of patterns and mechanisms that explain why certain initiatives are more successful in achieving socially innovative outcomes or influencing housing systems.

In the next phase of Work Package 6 research, we will conduct an in-depth case study of four socially innovative initiatives and produce a comparative working paper based on our findings. The aim of this second report, scheduled for publication on the EqualHouse website in September 2027, is to identify and present specific governance and business/financial models, and to consider the policy environment required to scale up socially innovative housing models capable of promoting sustainable, inclusive and affordable solutions to address housing inequalities.

5.3.2 Application for Comparative Research in the Wider Field

For researchers beyond this project, the typology offers a flexible and transferable tool for comparative housing research. It can be used to structure case

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study selection in different ways: for instance, by focusing on initiatives within the same ideal type to explore variation within a shared model, or by comparing initiatives across types to analyse fundamentally different approaches to housing provision.

In doing so, the typology helps to overcome the fragmentation that has characterised the field, providing a shared conceptual language and framework that can be applied across national and disciplinary boundaries. This is particularly valuable for advancing cumulative knowledge and building more coherent theoretical insights into alternative housing.

5.3.3 Application for Policymakers and Practitioners

Finally, the typology has important implications for policymakers, NGOs, and housing practitioners. By situating specific initiatives within a broader landscape of socially innovative housing, it enables these actors to better understand the position, potential, and limitations of different models.

This can support more informed decision-making in several ways. For policymakers, it can help identify which types of initiatives are most aligned with specific policy goals, such as affordability, inclusivity, or scalability. For practitioners, it can provide strategic insights into how their initiatives relate to broader system dynamics and where opportunities for collaboration, replication, or institutional support may lie.

More broadly, the typology can contribute to the development of coherent policy and strategic agendas that recognise the diversity of socially innovative housing while also identifying pathways for scaling and embedding more transformative models.

5.4 Concluding Reflections

In conclusion, in this report we have argued that socially innovative housing initiatives occupy a critical space between immediate problem-solving and long-term systemic transformation. While not all alternative housing models are inherently transformative, those that engage with unmet needs, reconfigure social

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relations, and reshape governance structures hold significant potential to contribute to more just and equitable housing systems.

The typology developed in this report does not provide definitive answers about which models will achieve such transformation. Instead, it offers a structured and theoretically grounded tool to better understand the diversity of initiatives, the conditions under which they operate, and the pathways through which they may influence housing systems.

By bridging the gap between empirical diversity and theoretical analysis, this report contributes to ongoing debates on housing inequality, social innovation, and housing regime change. It highlights that the future of affordable housing in Europe will not be determined solely by state or market actors, but also by the capacity of socially innovative initiatives to challenge, complement, and ultimately reshape the systems in which they are embedded.

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