

# THE MICROGEOGRAPHIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: Architect(ure) and Social Housing

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**Abstract:** This paper outlines the preliminary framework for the author's doctoral studies in urban planning, which aims to be an academic critique and investigation of the role of architecture, as a practice, and architects, as professionals, in the current status of social housing development. Based on an evolving and expanding literature review, the discussions are framed in three broader categories of 'premise', 'context' and 'investigation'. The study would be primarily *premised* on the notions of the necessity of decommodification of housing and Lefebvre's "Right to the City". Within such preliminary and broad conceptual framework, the study then proposes positioning the research within its socio-political and architectural contexts. While the former is represented by neoliberalism, the currently predominant ideology and driving force behind the majority of governments' decisions and policies all over the world, the latter limits the study to social housing as the architectural manifestation of social justice in the contemporary city. For further contextualization as well as proper-feasible-examination of how state policies have evolved, social housing development and government's attitudes towards it would be examined more thoroughly in the Canadian context. The Canadian case study would delineate how capitalist and neoliberal ideologies have been applied in a geographically and socio-politically specific context. To complete the roadmap for the study, it is then proposed to critically *investigate* the role of architects and architecture in the process of social housing production. The hypothesis is that architectural practice is so tightly entangled with capital that architects have been reduced to mere facilitators of the neoliberal modes of production of space and, in doing so, have knowingly or unwittingly deprived architecture from being a powerful aesthetic, experiential and morphological tool for the manifestation and embodiment of social justice in the city.

**Keywords:** Architecture, right to the city, social housing, capitalism, neoliberalism

## INTRODUCTION

Housing means many things to different groups. It is home for its residents and the site of social reproduction. It is the largest economic burden for many, and for others a source of wealth, status, profit, or control. It means work for those who construct, manage, and maintain it; speculative profit for those buying and selling it; and income for those financing it. It is a source of tax revenue and a subject of tax expenditures for the state, and a key component of the structure and functioning of cities. (Madden and Marcuse 2016, 11)

Just as housing could mean "many things to different groups," it has also been the subject of research in many fields and disciplines, academic or otherwise, and from a variety of perspectives. The wealth of information on the topic is both an opportunity and a challenge: opportunity, as it provides a solid foundation for research on the subject, but also challenging as it seems many areas of research in the field have already been exhausted. Building on the richness, depth and breadth of the preceding thought, inquiry and research in the area, this paper would be an attempt to develop an outline for a line of inquiry into the issue of housing that will eventually make a contribution, however small, to the knowledge we have already accumulated over the years.

To establish a meaningful and hopefully useful research roadmap, this paper has been divided into multiple sections; namely: 'Introduction', 'Premise', 'Context', 'Investigation' and 'Discussion and Conclusion'. The current section, 'Introduction', continues with a clarification on the focus of the research as it relates to housing and the questions it could ask. It is followed by the section titled 'Premise', which describes the overall theoretical position of the research. The next section, 'Context', will then try to contextualize the research from a politico-economical perspective (capitalism/neoliberalism) and through an examination of geographically specific application of capitalist/neoliberal ideology to a distinct context (Canada). The section titled 'Investigation' focuses on the critical evaluation of the subject of the research inquiry, that is, architecture and architects. The paper concludes with outlining the core question of the research followed by a re-examination of architecture and the barriers preventing architects from making a meaningful contribution to the design and development of social housing.

## 'SOCIAL' HOUSING

Referencing Madden and Marcuse (2016), this paper considers housing primarily as "home for its residents and the site of social reproduction" (11) and excludes the other meanings of housing they have outlined.

This research also takes a 'moral' position based on which access to decent housing should be considered a universal right. While it will be further elaborated in the following section, a central premise of the research is rejecting the concept of housing as commodity and property. This is because, as Madden and Marcuse (2016) assert, as long as housing is considered a commodity, its availability is subject to the rules of the market and the buying power of the actors within it. This, they state, is in contradiction with the universal need for housing, since the ability to buy is obviously not equal and, in the case of those in the dire need of housing, actually non-existent.

There are already viable options for non-market housing; perhaps the most well-known example is the co-operative model. Rental housing could also be an alternative to the commodity-centred market housing provided the landlord is either a co-operative, non-profit organization or public entity with no financial or political agenda.

In his review of housing in Canada, Sewell (1994) has provided an extensive account of various types of housing, including social housing. He very clearly differentiates public housing from other types by defining it as having to meet "two criteria: it is housing owned by a government or government agency; and rent paid on all units is calculated according to household income" (132). He also uses the term "social housing" for non-profit housing and clearly differentiates it from "both market housing and government-controlled public housing". He lists the "characteristics" of social housing as follows:

- "It is not built for profit, but for social reasons."
- "Financial support comes from government, and without that projects would not be viable in the first instance."
- "Housing projects are generally conceived and delivered by groups of people interested in meeting housing needs, not by a company that has lined up a number of financial backers and investors."
- "Project management is usually hands-on and tailored to the target resident profile; in the case of co-op housing, management is resident-controlled" (163).

'Social housing' as referred by this paper would be a model based on either Sewell's definitions of "public housing" and "social housing" or a hybrid model combining the characteristics of the two. The key is that, regardless of the tenure, it would have to be non-market housing which cannot be exchanged as a commodity; it

would be home, as Christopher Alexander asserted, and where the ownership is on control not finance:

Do everything possible to make the traditional forms of rental impossible, indeed, illegal. Give every household its own *home* [emphasis added], with space enough for a garden. Keep the emphasis in the definition of *ownership on control, not on financial ownership*. [emphasis added]. (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 395-396 in Sewell 1994, 56)

The emphasis on the universal right to housing while rejecting the notions of private property and housing as commodity are the core premises of this research. The following section further expands on these notions.

## 1. PREMISE

Madden and Marcuse (2016) argue that, as a result of the "interlocking processes of deregulation, financialization, and globalization," housing has never been as commodified as it is today (36). Despite the prominence of the notion of 'housing as commodity', this research is based on an approach that sees not only its focus of study, social housing, but in fact housing in general outside the circuits of market and capital. It is based on the premise that housing should be disentangled from the web of capitalist notions of private property and commodity. It is also premised on the notion of providing, in Lefebvre's (1996) words, a place of "inhabitation" most importantly for those who have been socially and economically disadvantaged by the processes of capitalism and under the umbrella of free market values.

### 1.1. DECOMMODIFICATION

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.,—in short, when it is used by us .... In place of all these physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses – the sense of having. (Marx 1844, in Sklair 2017)

In almost two centuries since Marx's vehement statement in 1844, the notion of private property has only gained momentum under capitalism and its relentless promotion of consumerism. The result is that private property is such a ubiquitous concept and so enshrined in today's culture that according to Sklair (2017) it has made "people believe that human worth is best created and happiness best achieved in terms of consumption and possessions" (225).

Perfectly dovetailing with consumerism is commodification, the other fundamental tenet of capitalist ideology. Madden and Marcuse (2016) define commodification as "the general process by which the economic value of a thing comes to dominate

its other uses." Maintaining that housing has been entrapped within the process of commodification, they postulate that as a result the financial value of housing has utterly eclipsed its use as a place of living, as home (17). The authors also believe that we are struggling with a housing crisis because of the "basic characteristic of capitalist spatial development [that] housing is not produced and distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all; [rather] it is produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few" (10). Their characterization of "capitalist spatial development" as the cause of today's housing crisis is supported by Lefebvre's (1996) observation that:

There is a contradiction between the need to organize space according to the demands of society and private property which is increasingly in conflict with collective interests. (211)

With "collective interests" and the public good as the most fundamental aspirations of this research project, it would then seem logical to address the issues of housing, in general, and social housing, in particular, outside of, if not antithetically to, capitalism and its tenets of private property and commodification. While decommodification of housing is the response to the latter, "ownership on control" (Alexander, Ishikawa, and Silverstein 1977), instead of financial ownership, could be the antithesis to the notion of private property.

## 1.2. LEFEBVRE'S RIGHT TO THE CITY

The issue of housing the socially and economically disadvantaged is by nature enmeshed with the issue of social justice. In the earlier stages, the research had adopted Susan Fainstein's (2010) concept of "the Just City" as its theoretical framework for addressing the issue. In a paper with the same title as her 2010 book, "The Just City," Fainstein (2014) admits that "[she is] willing to embrace reform through existing political-economic processes, rather than viewing greater justice as unattainable under capitalism" (12). But as this research has evolved to take an antithetical position in relation to capitalism, it agrees with Sklair (2017) that "a radical disengagement with capitalist globalization offers the best prospect of escaping from the destructive consequences of class polarization" (256) and its ensuing social and economic injustices.

This radical approach is perhaps best represented in Lefebvre's (1968) concept of "the Right to the City" that has been equally foundational and inspirational for both academic approaches to the issue of social justice and grassroot social movements. According to Marcuse (2014) "For Lefebvre, the Right to the City is a political claim: a cry and a demand for social justice, for social change". In Lefebvre's own words:

The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life. (*The Right to the City* in Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 158)

Lefebvre further elaborates his proposition in *Perspective or Prospective*:

The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city. (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 173-4)

Lefebvre's call for social justice is a "militant demand for the democratization of control over the collective means of producing urban space" (Brenner 2013, 45). Marcuse (2014), while presenting six different "readings" of the concept, criticizes what he calls "collaborationist reading" which calls for "mild reform" (perhaps those like Fainstein's proposition). He emphasizes "the fact that Lefebvre's call recognized the inevitability of conflict and necessity for struggle [however] is blatantly denied, concealed, and made toothless [by collaborationist readings] behind a facade of good intentions, rationality, and quest for consensus" (8).

As "a deeply spatial understanding of politics" (Purcell 2014, 148) Lefebvre's proposition is all more relevant to the topic of investigation in this research project, i.e., architecture. But, as Marcuse (2014) has cautioned, the spatial nature of the Right to the City should not be mistaken for a narrow reading of Lefebvre's concept as a literal call for designing "the city as a built environment, as physical space" (7) nor should Lefebvre's notion of city be considered "limited in any way to the physical city" (5). This is perhaps best explained by Lefebvre in *Space and Politics*:

The right to the city ... is not a natural right, nor a contractual one. In the most 'positive' of terms it signifies the right of citizens and city dwellers, and of groups they (on the basis of social relations) constitute, to appear on all the networks and circuits of communication, information and exchange. This depends neither upon an urbanistic ideology, *nor upon an architectural intervention* [emphasis added], but upon an essential quality or property of urban space: centrality. ... [T]here is no urban reality without a centre, without a gathering together of all that can be born in space and can be produced in it ... . The right to the city legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization. (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 194)

## 2. CONTEXT

This section outlines the economic and political environment, as well as geographically specific housing policy context where the subjects of investigation,

architects, and architecture, will be studied. Neoliberalism is the political and economic context while Canadian housing policy, particularly in relation to social housing, is the area being introduced as a case study for the geographically specific application of, first, capitalist and, more recently, neoliberal agendas in social housing development.

### 2.1. NEOLIBERALISM

Brenner (2013) posits that in the context of urban design and planning today “even the most radical designers are seriously constrained by the politico-institutional contexts in which they work” (42-3). These “politico-institutional contexts” have been dominated by neoliberalism since the economically and socially tumultuous years of the 1970s (Purcell 2002).

According to Fainstein (2014) “Neoliberalism’ refers to the doctrine that market processes produce the most efficient allocation of resources, provide incentives that stimulate innovation and economic growth, reward merit, and consequently are conducive to the greatest good of the greatest number.” She further asserts that under this doctrine for “the market to work, state action that distorts prices and interferes with rewards to investors must be minimized; rather the local state needs to offer incentives to investors if it is to compete within the world system of cities.” Fainstein concludes that “under this governing principle, efficiency becomes the single criterion for evaluating public policy, and cost-benefit analysis becomes the tool for its realization” (6).

Both Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the United Kingdom—followed by other political leaders such as Mulroney in Canada—championed neoliberal thought and policies in the 1980s. Fostered by rapid globalization in the following decades, neoliberalism is today the predominant force in the economic and political arenas worldwide. The overwhelming “neoliberal consensus in favor of free markets” has marginalized the left and labor movements while “[notions] of ‘the public good’... challenged and increasingly replaced by privatization and an emphasis on ‘individual responsibility’” (Dunham-Jones 2014, 155).

Blaming neoliberalism for “declining enfranchisement in the cities”, Purcell (2002) postulates that it has resulted in “a rescaling [of the state apparatus] to sub- and supranational scales, . . . [reorientation of] policy away from redistribution and toward competition, . . . [and] a shift from government to governance” (100). Contextualizing neoliberalism within the field of urban policy and governance Brenner (2013) maintains that “these [politico-institutional contexts] are generally defined by the naturalized imperatives of growth-first, market-oriented urban economic policy and by approaches to

urban governance in which corporate and property-development interests maintain hegemonic control over local land-use regimes” (43).

The previous section identified the theoretical framework of this research project. As a study of the role of architecture and architects in the design and development of social housing within its larger urban context, the preceding provided a brief definition of the “politico-institutional” and economic contexts within which architecture operates. It also helped contextualize the ‘premises’ of this research project—social justice, the public good and decommodification—within the current political environment. The following subsection is a brief study of the geographically specific case study, i.e., housing policy and social housing in Canada.

### 2.2. HOUSING POLICY IN CANADA: A CASE STUDY

As Walks (2013) has elaborated: “Canada’s cities reveal patterns of urban development, levels of inequality, and rates of growth that follow a middling path between those established in the U.S., UK, and Europe” (155). As such, a study of the Canadian context could provide a balanced—middle of the road—representation of the political, social and economic trends that have been dominating the housing and social policies in the developed countries. In this section, the Canadian housing policy has been primarily evaluated through the role of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and two main sources: John C. Bacher’s (1993) *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* and John Sewell’s (1994) *Houses and Homes: Housing for Canadians*. Although both books were published in the early 1990s, the Canadian government’s overall social housing policy has not significantly changed since.<sup>1</sup> In fact, by the early 1990s, major shifts towards neoliberal policies had already happened in Canadian housing policy. Two of the main changes were the total abandonment of “Public Housing” development in 1978 (Sewell 1993, 137) and ending federal support for any new “non-profit or non-profit co-op” in 1994 (174).

As “Canada’s national housing agency” (CMHC, “About,” n.d.) CMHC is “a Crown corporation governed by a Board and responsible to Parliament through a Minister” (CMHC, “Management and Governance,” n.d.) “The legislative framework governing CMHC consists primarily of the *Canada Mortgage and Housing Act*, the *National Housing Act* and the *Financial Administration Act*” (CMHC, “Board of Directors and Committees,” n.d.).

The Canadian government’s direction on social housing policy is perhaps best exemplified in an exchange in 1956-57 between Stewart Bates, the head of the CMHC (then called Central Mortgage and

Housing Corporation) and the corporation's board. According to Bacher (1993), the CMHC board "gave Bates [...] a lesson in its philosophy of social housing" when they "informed him that his attitude that public housing should be 'primarily an instrument of social policy to remedy the conditions of the poor who live in bad housing' was *wrong* [emphasis added]" (214). The board made it clear that "the needs of individual tenants should be *secondary*" [emphasis added] to 'economic and urban development considerations.' Public housing would provide only 'a bare minimum of housing for the occupants;' . . . Spartan shelter would make it 'clear' that CMHC was *not* [emphasis added] 'competing with private enterprise.'" (Bacher 1993, 214)<sup>2</sup>

It may seem unfair to judge the performance of the Canadian government over almost a century through one exchange between the CMHC board and its head less than ten years after the corporation was created. However, both Sewell (1994) and Bacher (1993) have extensively documented how the federal government often in line with its provincial and local counterparts has always protected market housing, home-ownership and the real-estate industry at the expense of social and public housing. What follows is a chronological summary of some 'evidence' provided by Sewell and Bacher that shows the government's bias in favor of the market:

- "The tendency of Canadian cities to regulate urban development primarily to *ensure maximum returns to land speculators* [emphasis added]" rather than addressing the housing crisis, as noted by [Thomas] Adams, pioneer of the Canadian town-planning profession in 1917" (Bacher 1993, 53).
- W. C. Clark's response to the criticism by David Mansur (later the first head of CMHC) "that the benefits of the Dominion Housing Act (DHA) of 1935 were meant to be reserved *for the wealthy* [emphasis added] and that the legislation was *devoid of social purpose*. [emphasis added] . . . he said: all the government wanted was 'to encourage building.'" (Bacher 1993, 92). Not coincidentally, parallel to the government's initiative, Bacher (1993) also points out how during the Great Depression of the 1930s, "the poor were suddenly discovered by unemployed architects, town planners, trade-union leaders, and enlightened segments of the construction industry when they realized that ensuring adequate shelter for low-income families would bring prosperity to their own damaged industry" (37).
- "Centralizing housing authority" through creation of CMHC by the Department of Finance [which] through their control of CMHC's executive board [were] effectively in control [and] responsible for advising the federal Cabinet on housing policy. Social housing would not be an important priority, but merely an incidental frill to deck out a business enterprise in a garb more appropriate to a public agency, achieving the desired appearance of change in the face of a rigid commitment to the *market ethos* [emphasis added]" (Bacher 1993, 180).
- Developing "the Rental Insurance scheme [in the 1950s], which guaranteed the owners of rental housing sufficient income to pay taxes, debt service charges, operating expenses, and repair and replacement costs." However, it resulted in "the construction of *unserved dwellings* [emphasis added], 'cold-water flats' lacking central heating and hot water. [...] Not only was much of the Rental Insurance housing unheated, it was frequently of poor design" (Bacher 1993, 189), so that it would not undermine private market housing.
- Encouragement in the 1950s and 1960s by the federal government of "spartan, severe standards for public housing [...] intended *to avoid competition with entrepreneurs*, [emphasis added] who, it was assumed, would build a better-quality product for those who could afford it" (Bacher 1993, 12).
- "[The] National Housing Act of 1954" that "set the basis for sustained federal assistance to the private mortgage market" and "still forms the basis of federal legislation, reflects the continued thrust of government efforts to prime the pump of the *private market* [emphasis added]" (Bacher 1993, 270).
- The social and economic failure of the Urban Renewal program in the 1960s and early 1970s, despite the fact that it resulted in the increase of Canada's stock of Public Housing from 10,000 in 1964 to 115,000 in 1974 (Sewell 1994, 135).
- "The decision of the federal government in 1972 [...] to exclude from the [capital gains] tax the sale of a personal residence [benefiting] only *owners*, [emphasis added] not tenants, and [...] those whose properties most increase in value" (Sewell 1994, 94).
- The "sudden end of federal land banking in 1978" due to the "opposition from *entrepreneurial housing developers* [emphasis added] and a reduction of city-sponsored and -assisted activity" (Bacher 1993, 11).
- "Support for private rental housing and renters has never been at the forefront of housing policy in Canada" (Sewell 1994, 117).
- Government's investment in home ownership programs "in all likelihood represent a majority of the money spent on housing programs since the Second World War, even though *owners and potential owners*



*are not* [emphasis added] the Canadians *most in need* [emphasis added] or with the most substantial problems of affordability" (Sewell 1994, 95). In fact, "one big problem [with home ownership programs] is that public housing tenants are poor; they don't have the money to be able to buy and maintain a home" (Sewell 1994, 154).

- Despite the success of non-profit housing in creating "socially successful communities" and over 200,000 affordable housing units in 20 years, the federal government decided in 1994 to end support for any new non-profit housing developments (Sewell, 189).

In summary, Sewell (1994) quotes Farris "that Canada has seen three distinct periods of housing policy: from 1954 to 1963, characterized by stabilization and growth; from 1964 to 1977, a period of equity and affordability; and after 1978, characterized by stagflation and restraint" (14). Although, since publication of Sewell's book, the Canadian economic and political scene has gone through many changes, what has been constant is the shrinkage of government contribution to social or assisted housing programs that started in 1978 and seems to have only intensified under neoliberalism since then.

It should be noted that despite all criticism about the failures of the Canadian government's housing policy over the past hundred years, government initiatives such as the National Housing Act amendments of 1964 and 1973 resulted in significant increase in Public Housing or co-operative units (205,000 of the former by 1978 when the program ended and 200,000 of the latter by 1994). As Bacher (1993) concludes: "Canadian housing policy will continue to fluctuate between the poles of a compassionate, normative community and rapacious striving for economic mastery" (278).<sup>3</sup>

### 3. INVESTIGATION

The preceding sections outlined the 'premise' and 'context' of the research project. This section addresses the subject of 'investigation' or research. Although "architectural profession [...], as is commonly known, is responsible for the design of only 2 percent of the annual built production" (Frampton 2005), due to their size and complexity, social housing projects have to almost always be designed by a licenced architect.<sup>4</sup> This study would examine the role of architects and architecture in the design and development of social housing under neoliberalism and in Canada. As the actual data collection stage of the research—most likely using qualitative methods—has not begun yet, this section provides an overview of architecture from a social and political point of view.

#### 3.1. ARCHITECTURE: A CRITIQUE

Certainly, architecture excludes the world of construction that excludes architects; that is, it excludes those developments that are guided by a profit margin unable or unwilling to pay for professional architectural services. (Deamer 2014, 2)

The above excerpt is from Peggy Deamer's introduction to a collection of writings by architectural scholars on the history of architecture and capitalism. That architecture is in fact in the service of an exclusive group is best reflected in a recent publication by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), where they stated that today only 6 percent of homes in the United Kingdom are designed by architects (RIBA 2018). But working for this exclusive clientele has also meant being, as Brenner (2013) observed about designers in general, "seriously constrained to the politico-institutional contexts in which they work" (43). Therefore, "[the] architect has always [ended up being] a servant: of a regime, of a society or of an individual sponsor" and "subject to the reason of those in power" (Comerio 1981, 30). Similarly, Sklair (2018) reverberates the concern for architects' servitude to those in power by postulating that "architecture has always been an instrument of control and compliance" (162). Elsewhere, he reiterates: "It has long been recognized that ... architecture has been used to express and reinforce the power of the strong over the weak" (Sklair 2017, 153). The relationship between architecture and the powerful is not a recent phenomenon:

Because building a building costs so much money, construction – and within it, architecture- necessarily works for and within the monetary system. One could say that the history of architecture is the history of capital. (Deamer 2014, 1).

While historically the religious authorities and political power were mostly the source of the "capital" needed for buildings (mostly monumental but also palaces, mansions, villas, and houses of the wealthy), recently architecture "along with every other cultural production (including music, photography, book publishing, the fine arts, and even education), [...] has been increasingly engulfed in and made subservient to the goals of the capitalist economy, more specifically the luring of consumers for the purpose of gaining their money" (Saunders 2005, vii). The subservience of architecture to the capitalist economy has also been reflected in the manner architectural professional practice has evolved.

At the same time that the skyscraper, the symbol of the Chicago School of architecture, gained popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century, it became the target of the labor movement and social activists

of the time who viewed it as the embodiment of mechanization (loss of employment), exploitation of labor, and accumulation of wealth by capitalism (Merwood-Salisbury 2014). Along with their clients' successful attempts to ward off the resistance by the labor movement, "the Chicago construction allowed the contractor and the architect to reposition themselves as managers of the building process, at the expense of the building tradesmen's traditional autonomy" (Merwood-Salisbury 2014, 35). In fact, this repositioning of the architectural profession within the construction industry was not limited to Chicago or the United States. Sklair (2017) points out that as "[the] pattern of architectural production began to change fundamentally in the 19th century [...] architects began to organize themselves professionally" (10).

This alignment of architecture, as a profession, with the values of capitalism and the ensuing detachment from the social issues and concerns of the working class was further exacerbated in the twentieth century. The substantial shortage of housing after the World War II justified further industrialization of building processes and mass production of housing. Thus, the flow of capital towards the building industry in general and housing, in particular, accelerated. Fascinated with the technological advances in mass production, building systems, and materials, architects limited themselves to "the study and application" of such technologies, "only the problems of how [were] relevant; the problems of why were assumed to have been resolved once and for all" (Comerio 1981, 30). Today, "architects working under capitalism ... continue to be seduced by the new technologies and materials it produces and the luxuries they enable" (Schuldenfrei 2005, 91).

Another consequence of the realignment of architectural profession with capitalist values and the ever-growing gulf between architectural practice, on the one hand, and those who are responsible for producing buildings, laborers, and those who use it, the inhabitants, on the other hand, is that profit-making has become the ultimate goal of architecture. Of course, "[architecture] has always been both an art and a business" (Dunham-Jones 2014, 162) and "architectural firms like all businesses in capitalist society, are in business to make profits" (Sklair 2018, 162). In fact, Sklair quotes F. Harder as far back as 1902 when "he had argued that the fine art view of architects was 'all pretty much a delusion . . . they are in reality fully as keen and of as large capacity in the business of money getting as any other constituency in American affairs'." (Harder 1902, 74 in Sklair 2013, 78). However, what seems to be happening under neoliberalism and "in the post-Reagan, postmodern era," is that "the model for architectural creativity [has been] more and more 'big' business"

and architecture has subsequently assumed "the ethic of business as its highest moral imperative" (Sorkin 2005, 28). At the local scale, "instead of challenging the class structure or economic power of the status-quo," architectural practices have been mainly focusing on producing "high design [that] increasingly serves to distinguish its elite patron class from the man in street" (Dunham-Jones 2014, 163).

The question is given the status of architectural practice today, as briefly examined above, and within the 'context' it operates: how or whether architecture as a profession or architects as individuals could contribute to the public good and social justice, when it comes to the issue of social housing. The paper discusses this question in the next and concluding section.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Obviously, it would be extremely premature for the paper to offer an answer to the core question of the study or provide any conclusive statements at this early stage of the research. Therefore, in concluding the paper, this section discusses the notions that will hopefully inform the methodological approach and modes of inquiry that could lead to answering the research question.

### "So, what is architecture?"

Lefebvre asks the above question in *Space and Politics* (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 188). Rejecting it as "art" or "science", "Architecture" Lefebvre believes "cannot be conceived other than as a social practice among others (for example, medicine)" (189). He goes on with the criticism that:

The architect, artist as well as learned man, accepted major fact of the priority of monumentality, the importance of religious or political buildings, over dwelling. . . . He is awkwardly placed between the engineer and the draughtsman; he does not know where he fits between developers, users, financial backers and public authorities. (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 190)

In defining architecture as a "social practice" and by emphasizing "*dwelling*", Lefebvre (1996) considers "the architect and architecture" as having "an immediate relationship with dwelling as social act, with construction as a practice." By positioning the architect "between the engineer and draughtsman" he emphasizes the role of the most important medium of architectural production, that of "drawing". Lefebvre then goes on to criticize how architects are deceived by their own drawings, assuming that the sheet of paper they use is "neutral [and corresponding] to the neutral space outside, which receives things, point by point, place by place. As for the 'plan', it does not remain innocently on paper. On the ground, the bulldozer realizes 'plans'." (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996, 191)

Lefebvre (1996) believes that "the architect cannot confine himself to drawing" nor could he "avoid oral consultation with other agents of this production, space" (193). He also rejects the "fragmentation" of space into "abstract spaces" at macro and micro level, which assigns each to the separate disciplines of planning and architecture respectively (194).

### PRACTICALITY

Lefebvre's critique of architecture hints at possible alternative means of producing space by architects (for example, by freeing itself from the confines of drawing, engaging other "agents" involved in the production of space and 'defragmentation' of the space itself). But 'pragmatists' raise the question of practicality; not only for realizing Lefebvre's ideals but also for much less challenging tasks, such as provision of proper social housing for the socially and economically disadvantaged. For example, a commonly cited barrier is zoning regulations. As Sewell (1994) points out, these regulatory barriers could range from "precise and prescriptive zoning controls" and "development standards" (64) to "parking requirements" (77), but he also provides examples of flexibility by the municipalities in relaxing such zoning requirements for social housing projects (179). In other words, zoning could also be leverage for local governments to require the real estate market provide some social and affordable housing.

Madden and Marcuse (2016) provide a broader and more informative perspective on regulation. Discussing the "relationship between the tenants and landlords, or between real estate owners and communities", they argue that regulation is a vehicle for providing fairness in a housing market, "a domain of struggle between different, unequal groups." They maintain that absence of regulations could "[shift] the power towards capital and away from residents - while also, not coincidentally, making land more valuable and more amenable to speculation" (47). In fact, as discussed in the 'context' section of this paper, neoliberalism advocates minimizing government intervention in the market. Regulation is the most powerful mechanism at the state's disposal to intervene and rein in the market. So, the call for deregulation, at any level or scale, could indeed be exploited and serve the neoliberal agenda.

Brenner (2013) has also addressed the issue of practicality but from the perspective of the design professionals' lack of "control or influence over investment flows, property ownership structures and political decisions" and answers the question that "isn't it far better to see a good, creative, imaginative design implemented than a bad, derivative, boring one?" (44). His response is that designers' "expertise, creative capacities and labor-power are recurrently

harnessed to mask, manage or soften the socio-spatial contradictions of neoliberal urbanism" and asks the design professionals to:

devise strategies to push back, with their full intellectual capacities, professional influence and political imagination, against the rules, constraints and ideologies imposed by neoliberal, market-oriented systems of urban governance and the forms of sociospatial injustice they produce at all spatial scales. (Brenner 2013, 45)

Brenner's answer could once again raise the question of practicality of such propositions. A convincing response is provided by Lefebvre to those who dismiss his notion of "the right to the city" as utopian or impractical. While admitting that "an orientation of economic growth which would no longer carry within it its 'finality', and no longer aim at (exponential) accumulation for itself, but would instead serve superior 'end' " could result in realization of "the right to the city," he argues that:

"While waiting for something better, one can suppose that the social costs of negation of the right to the city (and of a few others) accepting that we could price them, would be much higher than those of their realization." (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 1996:7)

### OTHER QUESTIONS

The process of literature review for this paper helped refine the core question of the research project. At the same time, several other important and relevant questions emerged. Some of these questions are listed below (the references cited in brackets have directly or indirectly informed the corresponding question):

- What is the role of architectural education in shaping the current status of profession? And vice versa. [Comerio 1981]
- Just as Lefebvre has emphasised, are the working class the only agents capable of achieving "the Right to the City"? [Lefebvre 1996; Marcuse 2014]
- What could be done to scale up the work of architects and designers who are already working with non-profit organizations that provide proper housing for the socially and economically disadvantaged? [Fishman 2018]
- As proven examples of success in the Canadian context, are non-profit and co-operative housing schemes the only alternative and 'realistic' solution to the issue of social housing? [Sewell 1994; Bacher 1993]

While it is expected that the above list grow as the research progresses, these and any future questions will be edited and refined to help either enrich the body of the research (e.g., the scope of the literature review), or inform the methodological approach it adopts (e.g., qualitative research design).



## A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Being currently in progress and in its formative development stages, the research methodology and design are also in a state of development. The data collection stage of the research would be primarily based on interviews with architects and review of literature mainly published in professional architectural journals. However, architectural education could also be investigated through the same critical lens, where program curricula, studio outlines and course syllabi would be examined. The data analysis stage of the research would then employ discourse analysis—mainly for interviews—in order to identify any common underlying political, social and economic orientations, attitudes and motivations within the discipline. Directed

qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis would also be employed to analyze data collected through both interviews and documents.

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This paper presented a framework for an investigation into the subject of 'social' housing and how it is approached by architects, the design professionals responsible for its various forms, configurations, and styles. As part of a doctoral research project in urban planning, the paper aims to provide an outline and a roadmap. Therefore, while it has been structured as a stand-alone paper, it is indeed a 'live' document that would be further developed as the research progresses.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The current Liberal government has recently initiated a 10-year, \$40-billion program called National Housing Strategy (NHS). However, it is still too early to examine any impacts of the program on housing affordability and particularly social housing as the main topic of this study.
- 2 "Memo, Stewart Bates to Robert Winters, 1 June 1956; letter to Stewart Bates, 12 Feb. 1957, cited in Dennis and Fish, *Programs in Search*, 1293." Cited in Bacher (1993).
- 3 The current Liberal government's National Housing Strategy should also be seen as part of the Canadian government's continuing fluctuation between the two "poles."
- 4 Provincial legislature in Canada requires that a licenced architect, as recognized by the provincial professional bodies, design and supervise the construction of any multi-unit residential building or any building above 3 storeys high or more than 600 square metres.

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