

# Revisiting Jim Kemeny's housing theory: Contested Housing Imaginaries in Vienna and Brussels

- Why is Kemeny's social theory still relevant?
- Meta theory: Kemeny's analytical Social Constructionism
- Engaging with the idea of “public policy myth”
- Complementary approaches from critical policy research
- Social Mix (by design) understood as an urban policy myth
- Case Study Illustrations
- Revisiting Jim Kemeny



# Jim Kemeny (1943-2020), pioneer of housing welfare studies

British sociologist and one of the founders of what became housing-welfare studies  
“the most influential is assuredly Jim Kemeny” (Blackwell and Kohl 2018, p. 1447).

He became also known for his work on:

(neoliberal)ideology, tenure, homeownership, comparative housing and social constructionism. (Jacobs and Manzi 2020, online)



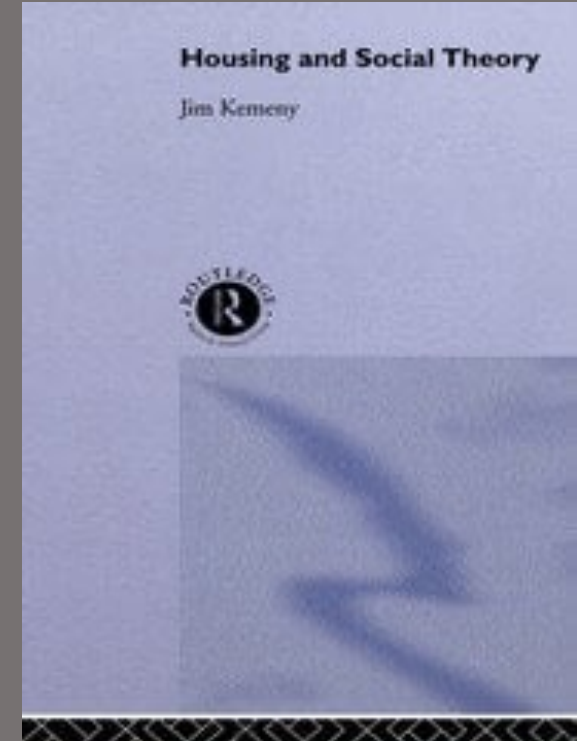
“Kemeny (1981, 1992) pioneered such an embedded conception of housing tenure, identifying the significance of dwelling and spatial practices, housing discourses and the role of myth in the ideological constitution and social impact of tenure.” (Ronalds 2009, p.218)

# Why is Jim Kemenys' (1943-2020) social theory still relevant?

- Offers a critical theory discussing power dynamics beneficial to the commodification of housing (Kemeny 1995, 2005)
- The relationships between housing and welfare (Kemeny 2005)
- Integrates notion of hegemony in relation to policy fields (i.e. housing)
- Analytical Constructionism and Housing Policy Research (1992)
- Explaining diverging paths between similar societies summarized as unitary/dualist rental model

(see O'Neil 2008)

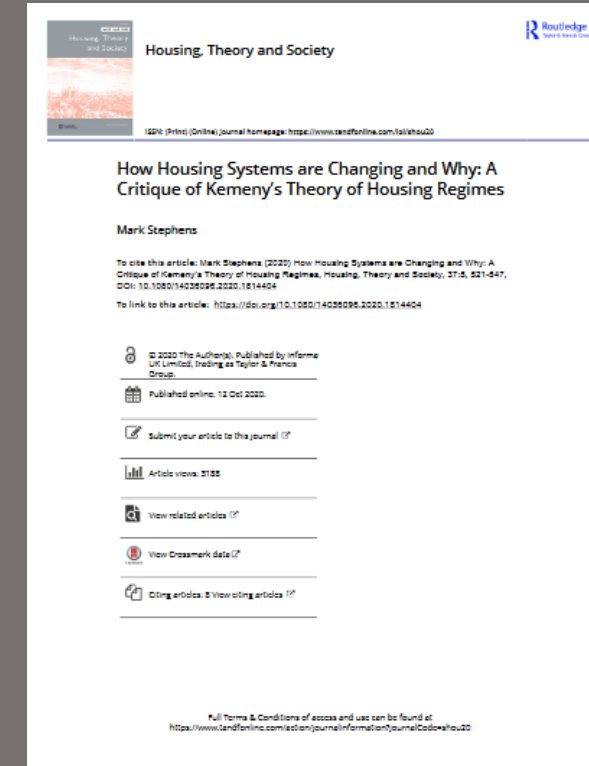
“he [Kemeny] advocates divergence of housing systems and theorizes an alternative model inspired by the Swedish, the German, the Austrian and the Dutch models. The *unitary rental model* is an alternative to the Anglo-Saxon model of a home ownership society and a dual rental market: home ownership as the social norm, and social housing as a safety net that is clearly separated from the commercial rental market.” (Elsinga 2020 p.557)



# The recent financial-maturation debate

Set off by Mark Stephens (2020) – How Housing Systems are Changing and Why: A Critique of Kemeny’s Theory of Housing Regimes

- Financial maturation of the cost-rental sector is not happening as foreseen in Kemeny’s theory
- The cost-rental sector as a means to define the whole housing system is problematic
- Convergence forces: (financialization and regulatory change) much more important to the re-structuring of housing systems (Stephens 2020; Whitehead 2020)



“The relationship between housing and the wider welfare regime was misunderstood, the belief that maturation would counterbalance loss of subsidy misplaced, and the refusal to accept the power of high-level forces of convergence associated with globalization myopic, whilst the post-GFC era of unorthodox monetary policy was unforeseeable.” (Stephens 2020, p.523)

# What did the financial maturation debate miss out ?

Kemenyi's (2013) idea of structure is related to a symbolic interactionist meta theory. He “ ... sees society as the product of definitions of reality, definitions that are the basis for social action, which in turn generates social organization.” (Sommerville and Bentsson 2002, p. 132)

On a macro level Kemeny assumes the working of ‘interaction-rituals’ and public myth, or fictional narratives that function to convey moral deeds, building as societal foundations to inscribe the main principles of what is perceived as reality in a “constant stream of talk” (Kemeny, 1992, p. 101).

He is “...interested in the role played by powerful interest groups in bringing housing problems into prominence through lobbying and policy making activity.” (Jacobs et al. 2004, p.6)

...for a housing problem to be accepted and acted upon. First, a convincing narrative needs to be deployed to tell a plausible story of a social problem. Second, a coalition of support has to be constructed, and finally this coalition needs to ensure that institutional measures are implemented. (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2003:430)

Social  
Constructionism in  
Housing Research

Edited by  
Keith Jacobs, Jim Kemeny and  
Tony Manzi



# Public “myths” in the (housing) policy making process

- Establishes an interpretative framework
- Ideological constitution and social impact of tenure (Ronalds 2009, p.218)
- Builds up affection
- Use of metaphors and established representations for imagining a better future
- Form publics by accepting certain definitions of housing
- Negotiate existing socio-institutional order through public discourse and rituals



The peoples home (folkhemmet):

“the People’s Home is a clear example of a myth in the transposing of the family idyll and the ideal of the home—as the nexus of household and dwelling—on to how a moral and proper society should function: as one big happy family, ensconced within the four walls of its home.” (Kemeny, 1992, p.132)

## Sum and Jessops' (2013) concept of a „social imaginary“

„An imaginary provides one entry-point (among many others) into a super complex reality and can be associated with different standpoints, which frame and contain debates, policy discussions and conflicts over particular ideal and material interests. [They] get reproduced through various mechanisms that help to maintain their cognitive and normative hold on the social agents involved in the field(s) that they map.” (Sum and Jessop 2013, p.166)

## Vivien Schmidts (2008, p.307) “Cognitive” and “Normative” ideas

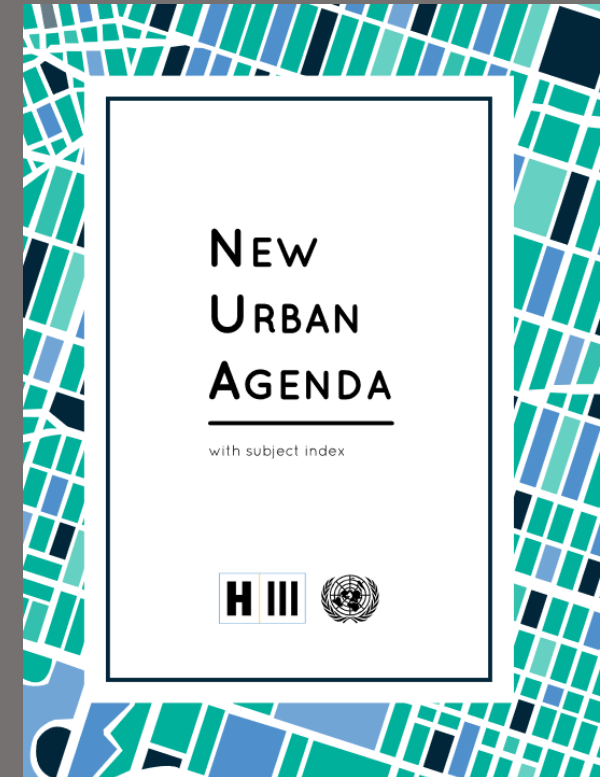
“Cognitive ideas speak to how (first level) policies offer solutions to the problems at hand, how (second level) programs define the problems to be solved and identify the methods by which to solve them, and how both policies and programs mesh with the deeper core of (third level) principles and norms of relevant scientific disciplines or technical practices. ...Normative ideas speak to how (first level) policies meet the aspirations and ideals of the general public and how (second level) programs as well as (first level) policies resonate with a deeper core of (third level) principles and norms of public life, whether the newly emerging values of a society or the long-standing ones in the societal repertoire (Schmidt 2008, p.307).

# Social Mixing (by design) as an Urban Policy Myth

Social Mix relies on a common set of beliefs about the benefits of mixed communities, with little evidence to support them (Marra et al. 2015). Growing evidence base that contradicts the precepts embedded in social mix policies (ibid). Social mix is heavily weighted toward the "middle class", involves "paternalistic and dirigistic actions that produce social polarization (Freie Planungsgruppe Berlin & Roskam 2013). Neighbourhood effects exist but are overrated. Middle class urbanization changes socio-spatial rationales of neighbourhoods by pushing exchange value as means of interaction with the neighbourhood (Harvey 1990).

Typical beliefs found in Social Mix policy research according to Wood (2003, p.49):

- promotes more social interaction and social cohesion
- encourages mainstream norms and values
- creates social capital
- opens up job opportunities
- overcomes place-based stigma
- attracts additional services to the neighbourhood
- leads to sustainability of renewal/regeneration initiatives





Other mixing Policy Fields: Neighbourhood  
activation/renewal, educational policy

Strategic Urban Planning

Housing Affordability

Subsidies (building or person oriented)

# Social Mix Policy

Housing policy

Non-profit/ Semi-public Housing Sector

Tenure mix

Zoning and Land Use Diversification

Tenancy Law

Building Types

Limited Profit Housing Law

# Case Studies illustrations: Social Mixing in Brussels

Policy Definitions of Social Mix: Related Public Myths / Imagin.	Institutionalisation of Social Mix in a Dualist Housing Regime	Housing governance (Institutional formation)	Social Mix Policy Outcomes
<p>Spatially targeted approach, neighbourhood effects construal &amp; social cohesion ***</p> <p>Public finances crisis construal, need to densify and attract middle classes, competition with Flanders Region</p> <p>Historical dimension: Suburban modes of living and strong emphasis on private homeownership</p> <p>Active civil society and rediscovering of the 1920s' garden city movement</p>	<p>ca. 6 % social housing in BCR</p> <p>Recognition of the urgent need of social mix and housing (PRDD)</p> <p>New zoning mechanism for land use diversification (ZEMU)</p> <p>Different subsidies from renovation &amp; constr. buying up of houses by SLRB, First time property (CityDef), social access to privately owned housing (AIS), Innovative social housing (Community Land Trust)</p>	<p>Mostly liberal approach</p> <p>Different competencies at municipal, regional and national levels</p> <p>Tendency towards the region, new competencies by the 6<sup>th</sup> state reform</p>	<p><b>Controlled gentrification:</b> targeted areas with high poverty rate (“croissant pauvre”)</p> <p>General housing affordability crisis.</p> <p>Middle class focused social mixing mostly in centre-close working-class areas.</p> <p>No percentage increase in decommodified housing</p>

# Case Studies illustrations: Social Mixing in Vienna

Policy Definitions of Social Mix: Related Public Myths / Imagin.	Institutionalisation of Social Mix in a Unitary regime	Housing Governance (Institutional formation)	Social Mix Policy Outcomes
<p>City wide neighbourhood scale, aim: (preventing stigma) &amp; social cohesion ***</p> <p>Red Vienna (public myth) is strongly emphasised and symbolic valued. Public housing estates are cultural monuments and representations of a just city.</p> <p>Civil society mostly in proximity to social housing and civic-organisation, and chamber of labour. Neoliberal critiques: targeting</p>	<p>ca. 45% social housing</p> <p>Recognition of the urgent need of new residential urban development and social housing (focus topic in STEP25, New zoning mechanism for land use diversification (“Gebiete für geförderten Wohnbau”))</p> <p>Different subsidies from renovation to new developmet: Gemeindebau Neu, Wohnbauoffensive, Smart Whg.) and person oriented subsidies (Wohnbeihilfe)</p>	<p>Overall: Social-democratic Corporatist power dynamic</p> <p>Competences on the city level, districts seen as enablers but with own budgets</p> <p>PPP since the GFC</p> <p>National policy making (Länderausgleich), Tenant Law, Limited profit housing law, interfere with housing regime (i.e. attic conversions, access to subsidies)</p>	<p><b>Defending a social infrastructure model:</b></p> <p>Barriers in access to social housing. Housing affordability crisis and discrimination in the private rental sector.</p> <p>Loss of “mixture” in traditional working class districts.</p> <p>New built social housing moves outwards → social suburbanisation and partial residualisation in public housing but <u>no decrease in social housing</u></p>

# Conclusion: Revisiting Jim Kemeny

Looking at changes in public definition of housing is insightful for the development of the larger social formation. It relates to care, gender, social relations and networks on a neighborhood level, mobilities and urban form, financial situation (Kemeny 2013, pp. 127-128). Housing policy thus is a strategic ground for the construction of cultural hegemony (moral and political leadership).

“Yet there is also some possibility that greater emphasis on the value of community and inclusion could, if maintained, lead to a stronger political commitment to more adequate, affordable homes.”  
(Whitehead, 2020, p. 577)

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