



# Comparing public housing revitalization in a liberal and a Mediterranean society (US vs. Portugal)☆

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 28 October 2016

Received in revised form 28 December 2016

Accepted 29 January 2017

Available online 21 February 2017

### Keywords:

Housing policy

Relocation

HOPE VI

PER

Public housing

Portugal

## ABSTRACT

Little has been written about public housing revitalization in the US (a liberal society) and Portugal (a Mediterranean one) from a comparative perspective. Our paper tries to close this gap. Based on a comparison of HOPE VI (US) and the Special Relocation Program (PER, Lisbon and Porto) we argue that despite major differences in context, there are similarities in the regeneration strategies in the two countries. First, physical improvement efforts at HOPE VI and PER sites have created more attractive places but the areas still suffer from an image problem. Second HOPE VI has a more explicit emphasis on social mixing although lower- middle-income families live in close proximity under PER. Third, neither program has been able to promote social cohesion through citizen participation. Fourth, relocation is more of a problem in HOPE VI. Fifth, both programs have made progress in achieving greater safety but the problem of incivilities and anti-social behavior remains. Finally, although HOPE VI has a more explicit self-sufficiency focus than PER, there is little evidence that that either effort has succeeded.

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## 1. Introduction

On both sides of the Atlantic, policymakers are dealing with the question of how to house the poor while at the same time improving the quality of the neighborhoods where the poor live. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) HOPE VI program is one of the most comprehensive policies that have been developed with respect to public and social housing regeneration (Cisneros & Engdahl, 2009; Turner, Popkin, & Rawlings, 2008). In Portugal, the Special Relocation Program (*Programa Especial de Realojamento*, PER), has been the largest public housing program ever developed in democratic Portugal, designed with the primary aim of eradicating slums in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto and rehousing former slum dwellers in council housing estates (e.g. Ferreira, 1994; Freitas, 2001; Guerra, 1999; Matos, 2004; Plano Estradégico da Habitação, 2008–2013).

PER was designed as a program of social housing for rehousing the residents living in very bad conditions. Thus, PER can be understood as a regeneration policy that demolished really poor housing and rehoused the residents in new social housing neighborhoods. HOPE VI,

on the other hand was not only aimed at redeveloping distressed public housing but also to create viable mixed income communities. To our knowledge, the present paper represents the first attempt to comparatively analyze public housing restructuring in the US and Portugal.

The new Athens Charter (2003) offered in Lisbon, presented “enlightened urbanism” for the 21st century. It emphasized rehabilitation, good urban management, the creation of public-private partnerships and the participation and integration of residents. The following sections show how PER and HOPE VI incorporated these concepts using similar means to reach these goals: public-private partnerships, mixed-income developments, a modest emphasis on relocation to non-deprived or mixed-income neighborhoods and the promotion of self-sufficiency among residents and relocatees.

In order to contribute to the academic debate, we provide a systematic and comprehensive comparison of neighborhood regeneration strategies in the U.S. and in Portugal. We are not presenting original research material, but instead, based on desk research and visits to HOPE VI and PER sites we are evaluating and comparing published research with a focus on the transferability of experiences between the two countries and the issues emerging from this cross-country comparison.<sup>1</sup>

The next section considers the historical and political context in which the public housing policies in each country were formulated and then presents a systematic comparison of both countries' policies

☆ This work was supported by a research scholarship under the Project FCT: UID/GEO/04084/2013, Project COMPETE: POCL-01-0145-FEDER-006891 to the Geography Studies Center and Spatial Planning (CEGOT) and a scholarship by University of Porto/Santander.

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<sup>1</sup> We draw heavily from the first author's co-authored article comparing public housing revitalization in the US and the Netherlands (Dekker & Varady, 2011) especially when we discuss the HOPE VI literature.

based on six key measures: physical change, social mixing, social change, relocation, crime, and self-sufficiency. For each topic we explain the policy goals, the measures taken to reach these goals, and the effectiveness of these measures according to recent academic and policy evaluations. Based on this comparative literature review we derive lessons for not only Portuguese and American policymakers but for policymakers in other developed countries as well.

## 2. A systematic comparison across two countries

Clearly, there are major differences between Portugal and the United States in the nature of the welfare state, in the social-economic context and in patterns of urbanization. Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes (1990) assigns Portugal to the Mediterranean countries group (also known as the southern Europe group, see Allen, Barlow, Leal, Maloutas, & Padovani, 2004; Andreotti et al., 2001; Castles, 1995, 1998; Ferrara, 1996; Hoekstra, 2013; Silva, 2002; Tammaru, Szymon Marcinczak, van Ham, & Musterd, 2016). These countries stand out based on their strong emphasis on familism. That is, a disproportionately large number of the welfare tasks are carried out within the family and without much interference from the market or state (Barlow & Duncan, 1994; Santos, 1985, 1993).

Several distinctive characteristics of the Portuguese housing market in the second half of the 20th century may be distinguished. The first was the wide-spread occurrence of self-help construction and the fact that the responsibility for solving housing problems fell largely on families. The reliance on families facilitated a surge in illegal construction and informal settlement in the 1970s, particularly in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto (Ferreira, 1984, 1993; Gaspar, 1981; Matos, 1990; Matos & Salgueiro, 2005; Soares, 1984).

Secondly, in Portugal, public housing investment has been driven to support homeownership through financial (subsidized credit) and fiscal benefits (Plano Estradégico da Habitação, 2008–2013; IHRU, 2015b). However, it should be noted that Portugal adopted a modern mortgage financial system when it joined the European Union in 80s.

Thirdly, and not surprisingly given the above, social housing in Portugal constitutes only about 2% of the total housing stock and is concentrated in the two metropolitan areas (Lisbon 22%, and Porto, 12%) (INE, 2012). Social housing includes units owned by the Institute of Housing and Urban Renewal (IHRU) (a government-run institute responsible for supporting and implementing government policy in the housing domain), the municipalities and not-for-profit entities that have in common state funding, rules for house size and rental costs and rental burdens. Portuguese social tenants come from a variety of backgrounds, immigrants from ex-colonies (Cape Verde, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe), poor Portuguese and Portuguese Gypsies (Costa, Cardoso, Baptista, & Rasgado, 1999; IHRU, 2015a; Malheiros & Fonseca, 2011; Pimenta, Ferreira, & Ferreira, 2001; Pinto & Guerra, 2013).

The U.S., on the other hand, is often called a liberal society, because of its dependency on the market, restricted public goods and a strong role for the market in the production of welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The US has promoted homeownership as a policy goal through mortgage-interest tax deductions and home loan insurance for lenders (Howard, 1997).

In the U.S. social housing constitutes about 5% of the total housing stock. This includes units owned by public or not-for-profit entities as well as subsidized housing owned by profit-making companies and individuals who receive various types of public subsidies that reduce rents for residents. In the U.S., blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately represented among public housing tenants although west coast cities like Seattle have large numbers of Asian residents.

Urban poor Portuguese neighborhoods (including public housing ones) are impacted by the concentration of socio-economic problems, the dependence of residents on governmental welfare, all resulting in an inter-generational cycle of poverty (Capucha, 1995; Costa, Baptista, Carrilho, & Perista, 2008; Costa, 1998; Costa et al., 1999). Similarly, the

urban poor in U.S. neighborhoods (including public housing ones) are impacted by a welfare and housing benefits system that promotes an inter-generational cycle of poverty.

In both countries there is considerable concern about anti-social and violent behavior committed by people of different backgrounds. In the US policy experts express growing concern about the neighborhood effects of concentrated poverty (Jargowsky, 2013). Portuguese policymakers seek to prevent the emergence of American-type “ghetto” conditions in certain parts of Portuguese cities, including large social housing complexes (Horta, 2007; Pinto & Gonçalves, 2000).

## 3. Policy discourse commonalities between Portugal and the US

Policy discourse on public housing regeneration in the two countries, particularly the emphasis on housing diversification and poverty deconcentration, is remarkably similar. Furthermore, in both countries there has been an extensive debate about neighborhood effects of individual regeneration projects on surrounding neighborhoods. In fact in Portugal, beginning around 2000, policymakers instituted “urban rehabilitation” as a national imperative and put forward new institutions and programs to favor it (see, e.g. Strategic Housing Plan, 2008/2013, the document, Make Happen Regeneration- from Portugal Business Confederation, (Confederação Empresarial de Portugal, 2011) and the National Strategy for Housing 2015/2020). Although there are few if any specific references in the Portuguese discourses to American and northern European projects, the policy challenges in both countries are so similar (i.e. how to revitalize distressed neighborhoods while helping to promote better well-being among residents) that the need for cross-learning is obvious.

There has been some comparative analysis of housing systems for the southern European countries (Allen, 2006; Allen et al., 2004; Balchin, 2013; Castles & Ferrara, 1996; Elsinga & Hoekstra, 2005; Holdsworth & Irazoqui Solda, 2002; Priemus & Dieleman, 2002). Pedro and Boueri (2011), compared social housing in Portugal and Sao Paulo, Brazil, with an emphasis on the Controlled Cost Housing (CCH) program in Portugal and the “My Home, My Life” program (*Minha casa minha Vida*) in São Paulo and Alves and Andersen (2015), comparing social housing in Portugal and Denmark, emphasize the increasing residualization and segregation of social housing, in both countries. Finally, Matos (2012) compared the dynamics of the housing market in Portugal with other European countries and Matos, Carballada, Marques, and Ribeiro (2015) compared the impact of the economic crises in housing and in social vulnerability in Portugal and Spain.

The remainder of the paper describes how the differences and similarities between the two countries have played out with respect to six components of revitalization: physical change, social mixing, social change, relocation, crime, and self-sufficiency. For each theme, we describe the approach (aims, interventions, outcomes) first for the U.S. and then for Portugal. The aim is not to show which of the two countries has been more successful but rather to show how each country can learn from the other. However, we first need to provide an overview of the history of public housing in the two countries.

## 4. The policy discourses

### 4.1. United States

The US public housing program was established as part of the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal in 1937. For a more detailed discussion of the history of America's public housing program see (Landis & McClure, 2010; Schwartz, 2010). Public housing's original goal was employment generation; slum clearance and meeting the needs of low-income families were added on later. Furthermore, public housing was originally designed for the “submerged middle class.” Managers made sure that families followed the rules to qualify for public housing, and they were not afraid to evict unruly tenants (Vale, 2000). Beginning in

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