Comparative housing research in the new millennium: methodological and theoretical contributions from the first decade

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Abstract

Comparative housing research encompasses a broad range of strategies and foci, which has promoted the exchange of information, catalysed policy development and encouraged theoretical debate. This presentation briefly outlines the different purpose (policy description, evaluation, strategic understanding and theoretical explanation); logical strategy (hypothesis testing, interpretation, model building and revision); multiple field of focus (locality, tenure, institution, household, individual, social relations, financial arrangements, organisations, welfare regimes, state’s role and neo-liberalism) and diverse contribution to theoretical debates made by comparative housing research in the 2000s. It summarizes recent progress, emerging from a range of social science disciplines, which has contributed towards key debates concerning shifts in housing institutions and governance, divergent housing regimes and welfare systems, unitary, integrated and dualist rental markets, social exclusion and neighbourhood decline, forms of housing tenure and their rise and fall, organisational behaviour and networks, local responses to globalisation, the nature of home and socially constructed housing experiences. This presentation encourages researchers to reflect on these differences and developments and contribute towards progress in the coming decade of comparative housing research.
Comparative housing research encompasses a broad range of strategies and foci, which has promoted the exchange of information, catalysed policy development and encouraged theoretical debate. However, comparative housing research is a field which is often driven by policy demands and afflicted by epistemic drift and historicism. Furthermore, academic debate has become fragmented not only because housing differs significantly over time and space, but also because there are competing ways of perceiving and analysing forms of provision, which stem from a different range of ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives (Lux, 2007, Lawson, 2006, Matznetter, 2006, Kemeny and Low, 1998, Somerville, 1994).

Crucial to the nature of comparative research is the chosen ontology, which defines the analytical focus and ultimately the findings produced. For example, researchers may nominate specific tenures for comparison, the outcomes of different housing markets, institutional norms and relations, or networks between actors or compare entire housing systems or segments thereof. The preliminary conceptualisation of housing phenomena and the chosen research strategy, influence the choice of data, analytical strategy and ultimately the findings of any comparative study. This paper provides an overview of this progress in an effort to refocus attention on both methodological concerns as well as theoretical progress.

Towards this goal, this paper provides a broad definition of comparative research before addressing key issues such as “why do we compare”, “how do we compare”, “what is the nature of causality” and encourages researchers to answer these questions through their own comparative endeavours. The paper concludes by drawing on comparative housing research undertaken over the past decade which has been presented at international forums.¹ Advances in empirical research, methodological criticism and theoretical progress are the focus of the final part of this paper.

What is comparative research?

Doling (1997) argues that all science is comparative. Comparison typically refers to research across national boundaries, but of course can be undertaken at any scale. In order to compare developments in two housing systems, we need to be clear about what we are actually comparing. For example do we compare tenure outcomes, trends in levels of production, housing costs or the content of policy, the organisation of provision or the relationships between key players and their mitigating circumstances?

¹ Including APNHR, ENHR, HAS, ISA RC 43, ISA RC 21, RSA and AHR.
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In other words, what level of housing reality or ontology are we really comparing: outcomes, mechanisms, contexts?

Further, beyond the level of comparison, is the question of territory and scale. Entire continents, regions, cities, suburbs, estates and their households can provide a focus for comparative endeavours. Certainly comparative housing research at the cross-national scale is most common in housing studies. However, in the spatial sciences defining the boundaries of territories for comparison is contentious. Indeed, political and economic geographers stress that the scale of comparison should reflect the boundaries of causal processes generating difference and change (Goodwin, 2001).

Pickvance (2001), like Doling (1997), argues that in a strict sense all analysis is comparative and can be divided into two initial branches being firstly (a) whether they explain differences or similarities or (b) make assumptions about causal patterns. Taking housing problem to illustrate Pickvance’s a further set of four categories can be made: if we find similar levels of home ownership in several countries, a universalizing comparative analysis would try to find similar causes in each country whereas universalizing comparative analysis with plural causation would acknowledge the possibility of different causes generating similar outcomes in different countries. Equally if we observe different levels of home ownership in different countries we might through differentiating comparative analysis seek to show that this is the result of variations in causal variables between the countries whereas differentiating comparative analysis with plural causation would acknowledge the possibility of similar causes generating different outcomes in different countries.

With this logic, analytical concepts and notions of causality can be fundamental to comparative research. Indeed competing causal theories do underlie comparative endeavours in housing studies such as convergence, divergence, path dependency, regime and regulation theory (including welfare regimes), competition theory and the variety of capitalism thesis.

Why undertake comparative research?

The aims of comparative research include understanding, explaining, evaluating or changing housing phenomena which occur in different over time and across different spaces. In practice comparative studies are frequently policy oriented but they might be at a more general level related to a desire to understand how a housing market or system or part of that market or system operates. This could include understanding how different institutional arrangements contribute to different housing outcomes. The aims could also be technique or theory-advancement oriented with comparative method being used to build new theoretical concepts (Kemeny et al, 2005).

Despite arguments calling for contextual sensitivity, a well argued selection of explanatory variables and a coherent methodological strategy, empiricism and narrativism continue to pervade comparative housing studies, either intentionally or unintentionally. Ideally, however, research aimed to reveal the complex, structured reality of housing systems and develop suitable conceptual tools to explain difference and change (Ploeger et al, 2001:1). Some researchers have argued for the application of non deterministic frameworks to facilitate more local definition of structures of housing provision. Not only researchers such as Ball (structures of housing provision) call for this approach, but also social constructivists such as Kemeny (unitary and dual rental markets).

Comparative studies for the purpose of policy transfer have had to confront arguments that “policies are the cultural products of history, time and place: they are rarely exportable” (Cullingworth, 1993:177). Beyond this ‘pure’ position, we know that knowledge of policy instruments and outcomes in one country does inform analysis of similar issues in another. For example, in the context of globalising financial markets, the rapid exchange of information concerning the opening up and deregulation of national financial systems; development of secondary mortgage markets; and more recently the re-regulation of national mortgage markets is testament to this exchange and transfer of policy which has great implications for national housing markets. Thus with appropriate regard for the problems of “transferability” comparative housing research can provide a catalyst for policy developments elsewhere. New policy ideas may arise from the stimulus of information about how
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things are done elsewhere and exposure to different approaches can challenge insular beliefs about the causes of problems and the effects of policy instruments. Certainly, understanding differences and similarities between societies can improve understanding of the processes at work within societies (Oxley, 1991).

What kind of logical processes are involved in comparative research?

There has been lively debate about methodological issues concerning comparative housing research at various forums (ENHR, 1990, UvA, 1999, Dublin, 2007), the proceedings of which have been published in various journals and host institute web sites. Heated debate has arisen because of differences in the logic of research and conceptualisation of housing phenomenon. Implicit in the purposes identified in above are a number of different epistemological strategies incorporating either the logic of induction, deduction or abduction and retroduction (see table 1)– all of which are subject to criticism and some have been harnessed by particular ontological schools of thought, such as Post Modernism, Social Constructionism and Critical Realism. For a detailed discussion of ontological alternatives see Lawson (2001), Ploeger et al, (2001), Blaikie (1993) and Somerville (1994). However, few researchers explicitly confront their differences, or justify their selection.

Table 1: Logic in comparative research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological strategy</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Induction (Durkheim)</td>
<td>a process of observing, describing and comparing housing phenomena in different contexts to produce generalisations grounded in reality. Social constructionists aim to gain a sense of environmental, institutional and cultural context without the blinkers of transnational theories or ethnocentricity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deduction (Popper)</td>
<td>a process of falsifying statements, through appropriate tests in different countries, to either corroborate a law or reject it. Positivists test their universal theories across observable outcomes in different cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction and retroduction (Harré)</td>
<td>a process of abstracting, postulating, testing and revising causal models and structures, not always observable, in order to explain empirical phenomena. Realists retroduce then compare causal mechanisms between cases, to explain difference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course beyond these simple definitions of logic are more nuanced and complex differences, unfortunately beyond the scope of this short presentation (but certainly within the scope of discussion). Here it is suffice to mention their key areas of concern: the nature of reality or ontological theory, the use of predetermined categories, the role of language, the importance of lay accounts, use of local experts and the objectivity of the researcher. There are also debates concerning the limits of generalisation across time and space and the contestability of knowledge claims made. While most researchers modestly seek to propose fallible and tentative theories, some researchers contend that there are no absolute truths to be found but rather competing perspectives. Other researchers confidently claim that there are regularities which can prove the existence of universal truths (Blaikie, 1993:6).

Whilst inductive and deductive methods are quite well known, a retroductive strategy while often practiced is less often explicitly defined. This involves a two stage process of abduction from concrete phenomena and retroduction to provide a contestable but competitive explanation (Danermark et al, 2002, Sayer, 2000). The first step involves interpretation and recontextualisation of the housing phenomena under consideration, using a plausible, justifiable set of explanatory ideas and concepts. This new interpretation is known as a postulate, or hypothetical conceptual model, which aims to
explain what is actually going on. This model is then tested and revised in the second retroductive stage, using methods such as contrastive and counterfactual questioning, in order to provide a more competitive explanation (Lawson, 2006:262-263).

In what way is causality important to comparative housing research?

This section is relevant to those who share the view that the pursuit of explanatory causes is a valid and feasible goal of research. Pickvance claims that the dichotomy between universalising and differentiating analysis is far too simple and stresses the importance of invoking plural causation to explain difference. Pickvance (2001) cautions that attributing cause is a difficult undertaking, pointing out the difference between deep-level structural causes and numerous contingent causes that are often interrelated. Moreover, he emphasises that structural and contingent causes are hard to keep apart. Critical realists argue that both are important in generating actual events or outcomes (Lawson, 2006).

If comparative housing research is to move forward with its divergence thesis, it must address the complex nature of causality over time and space. Towards this end a useful strategy involves the process of abstraction, taking apart complex empirical phenomena to reveal contingently defined interrelated relationships and processes, and reconfiguring these interdependent explanations to propose a more complex description, understanding or theory of explanation. This requires intimate working knowledge of the phenomenon to be analysed and compared. To aid this process, a number of researchers argue for methods used by ethnologists and social anthropologists (Haworth et al, 2004) and analytical historians (Mahoney, 2003) and whilst others stress the use of local experts rather than more distant gatherers of information (Balchin, 1990, Bourne, 1986, Harloe, 2005).

Further, given the slow and sluggish nature of housing provision (Bengtsson, 2008), explanations for difference and change need a historical, in depth case study approach rather than a static outcomes level correlation of similarities and differences. It must be sensitive to the embedded interdependencies of housing provision and in particular the dynamic and open nature of state structures operating within open markets, as well as housing consumption norms and aspirations, in order to produce more nuanced and accurate explanations for difference. Towards this end, this paper agrees with the arguments of Mahoney and Rueschemeyer:

> “From the perspective of the comparative historical tradition, the universalizing programs of the past ... have tended to generate ahistorical concepts and propositions that are often too general to be usefully applied in explanation. In viewing cases and processes at a less abstract level, by contrast, comparative historical analysts are frequently able to derive lessons from the past experiences that speak to the concerns of the present. Even though their insights remain grounded in the histories examined and cannot be transposed literally to other contexts, comparative historical studies can yield more meaningful advice concerning contemporary choices and possibilities than studies that aim for universal truths but cannot grasp historical details.” (2003:9).

Finally, causal analysis requires the establishment of some association between explanatory variables and an outcome variable, either within or across cases, at different spatial scales and over time (Mahoney, 2003:363). This perceived notion of causality must be coherently aligned within the selection of explanatory and outcome variables investigated via methodological strategy. Again, there are a variety of theories about the roots of causality, which have been summarised in Lawson (2006). Regardless of the roots, both Mahoney and Hall (2003) argue for a method of process tracing, which avoids mistaking correlations for causal processes. As small N cases rely more heavily on the selection of strategic variables, they must be clearly justified, tested and revised.

Directions in comparative housing research in the 2000s

Comparative research has a rich history, both within housing studies and in the disciplines of sociology, political science and economic history (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003). Comparative
housing researchers have stressed the existence of structures of housing provision (Ball, 1986, 1988, Ball and Harloe, 1992); critiqued the presence of a dominant constructivist ideology (Kemeny, 1983, 1992, Winter, 1994); and searched for underlying causal mechanisms of difference and change in housing systems (Dickens, Duncan, Goodwin and Grey, 1985, Basset and Short, 1980, Castells, 1977, Harvey, 1982, 1975).

Indeed, past comparative historical analysis of different housing systems has contributed a rich source of empirical data, methodological discussion and theoretical debate. Arguments have been put forward examining the role of social class and related movements in forms of housing consumption, land rent in residential development, maturation process in rental markets; the role of the state in housing; examining the changing role of housing consumption in daily life and its relationship with the development of different welfare states inspired by welfare regime theory (Esping Anderson 1990). Important criticisms have been made regarding the bluntness of large scale, albeit historically informed comparison, stressing the importance of and locally embedded nature of causality affecting national housing systems (Matznetter, 2007, Lawson, 2006).

However three theories have dominated comparative studies of social housing during the 1990s: Harloe’s theory of converging phases of development, Esping Anderson’s theory of welfare regimes (which originally excluded housing) and Kemeny’s divergence thesis, which has more recently focused upon the competitive position of private and non-profit landlords. Harloe’s convergence model perceives systems of housing as oscillating between mass and residual forms of provision linked to normal and abnormal phases in capitalist development (Harloe, 1995). For Kemeny (1995) divergent systems emerge partly as governments role in and response to different types of rental markets (dual, integrated, unitary), where different rental models (cost rent, market rent etc) and competitive market conditions are of strategic explanatory significance.

Following this brief review of developments in the last decade of 20th century, we now turn to recent progress in comparative housing research which has emerged in the 2000s. Of course, many studies continue to build on the work of the past, but others can be considered as path breaking and innovative. There have been recent advances in comparative housing debates concerning welfare regime theory, path dependency theory, competition and rental market theory, as well as a greater appreciation of the importance of local contingent conditions amidst global financial forces and of networks.

Esping Anderson’s welfare regime theory continues to influence comparative housing research and has generated a number of country cases studies (Hoekstra, 2005, 2003 on the Netherlands, Matznetter, 2002 on Austria) and less examined regions of Southern Europe (Allen et al, 2003). In addition to more nuanced categorisation of cases, theoretical progress been made by bringing together welfare regime theory with other types of development regimes (Matznetter, 2002, Lee, 2002).

During the 2000s, the structures of provision framework (Ball, 1998) has been embroidered via explicit application of Critical Realist ontology and notions of causality, comparing contingently defined emergent relations underlying different modes of housing provision through comparative historical analysis (Lawson, 2001). Lawson has recently extended this approach to explain the radical transformation of housing and urban development in Seoul, Korea ‘from Hanoak to Highrise’(2008) and explain the different role and market position of limited profit housing in Vienna and Zurich (forthcoming).

Social constructionists continue to emphasize both the discourse and wider structural features which explain how relations of power, interest groups and inequality are exercised and has provided valuable criticism of positivist methodologies and overly structural theories, which impose their own values and theoretical assumptions and deterministic standpoints (Haworth et al, 2004). They argue that social structure, including policy, are actually the products of conscious human agency and therefore highly malleable. Ethnographic methods to interpret different accounts of values, assumptions and traditions must be used in different cases. Ronald (2008) has recently compared the different role of home ownership ideologies have played in both Anglo-saxon and East Asian countries. A central concept is
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that 'home ownership ideology' are not benign but support particular alignments of social-power relations. Discourse analysis has also been used by Sorvoll (2009) to explain shifts in political ideology affecting housing policy in Denmark, Sweden and Norway over the last thirty years between social democratic parties and governments. A more pragmatic use of discourse analysis is made by Dekker and Varady (2009) to derive lessons for policy makers dealing with social housing regeneration on both sides of the Atlantic. Quilgars et al (2009) raise a number of important issues involved in cross national qualitative research.

The divergence and socially constructed line of reasoning continues to be influenced by the arguments of Kemeny (1995) against the dominance of Anglo-Saxon model of residualisation of the social rental sector and that profit and non-profit providers of rented housing can either be in competition with one another (unitary rental market) or not (dual rental market). This thesis has inspired a range of case studies (Amman and Mundt, 2009, Elsinga et al, 2008), comparative studies (Kemeny et al, 2005) and has prompted debate on the nature of competition and level of regulation affecting different segments of the housing market.

New theoretical directions which have influenced housing studies during the 2000s are considered below.

An emerging comparative approach uses theories from industrial organization involving the concept of market competition (Haffner et al, 2009; Oxley et al, 2007) and will be employed to compare the role of social and private landlords in two housing markets in the UK and NL (Lennartz et al, 2009).

The concepts of path dependence and institutional layering (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003) complement and enrich the divergence approach to comparative historical analysis, by strengthening the critique of convergence theses, such as globalisation and demanding more careful consideration of local regimes and causal processes (Terhorst, 2008, Heijden and Terhorst, 2007). This has led to the development of theories explaining the very different housing regimes present in five Nordic countries (Bengtsson et al, 2006) and establishment of an ENHR working group on historical explanation in housing Annaisson (2008), Bengtsson (2008), De Decker (2008), Lawson (2008) and Ruonavarra (2008) provide illustrations of this approach. A special edition of Housing Theory and Society (end 2009) will consider its use in comparative research.

In recent years, network theories (Di Maggio, 1997) have focused attention on the actors, institutions and organisations engaged in housing provision Brandson (2001) focused on the management of non-profit organisations, social landlords and their social task. Czischke (2008) focuses on the missions, values and activities of social landlords in Finland, England and the Netherlands, whilst Mullins and Sacranie (2009) examine different reasons for the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility techniques amongst social landlords in North West Europe via organizational case studies. Another application of organizational comparative research has involved action research to increase the neighbourhood focus of social landlords in the Netherlands and the UK (Van Bortel et al, 2009a, b). Such studies make no claims concerning pervasive social structures or power relations, but examine social constructed networks between agents engaged in housing related activities. Related concepts stem from governance theory in public administration, and place multiple actors and their decision making process in context. Inductively building theory from a range of local data sources, these researchers are concerned with contextualised agents and their decisions, which are viewed as players in policy games within defined arenas, actors in interdependent networks and organisations governed by norms and rules have also become an object of comparison (Gilmore, 2009, Rhodes and Van Bortel, 2007, Czischke and Guis, 2007).

The pervasive globalisation thesis, based on the increasing mobility of (manufacturing) capital and financial markets across international boundaries and the undermining of national rules of regulation and their capacity to steer investment, has also influenced comparative housing research (Smart, 2003). A weak globalisation variant, giving more autonomy to national governments, has informed comparative research on the different experience of home ownership across Europe, using data of asset formation and qualitative case studies (HOSE project, Doling and Ford, 2003). It has also inspired
other European research on the security and insecurity of home ownership (OSIS, Boelhouwer et al., 2005)\(^2\) and the uneven role of ownership plays as a commodified housing tenure within increasingly asset based systems of social welfare (Hegadüs, 2009, DEMHOW)\(^3\).

Focusing on financial markets, a primary object of globalisation, Sassen (2009) explains how mortgages have become a new channel for extracting household incomes. The packaging of mortgages and their resale on the capital market as residential mortgage backed securities facilitates profit making from the excessive sale of financial products, rather than the steady repayment of mortgage obligations. Wainwright (2009) and Aalbers (2008) return to the work of Harvey (1982) concerning **capital switching**, not only to explain this process of financialisation but to focus on the process which has caused the global financial crises. Recent developments in comparative political science and economic geography concerning the ‘variety of capitalism thesis’ (Brenner, 2004, Goodwin, 2001, Boyer, 2000) have also been used to argue why some mortgage markets have been more resilient to the problem of default and repossession than others (Aalbers, 2009).

Of lesser fame, but no less importance are explanations for difference between so called ‘national’ housing systems, researchers have also paid attention to **dynamic state structures at the urban scale** in the development of long term housing solutions using a variety ideas from locality studies, regulation theory, structural relational theory as well as the glocalisation and variety of capitalisms thesis Indeed, whilst national level analysis is common there are critics of this approach, especially amongst political and economic geographers, who argue for greater recognition of the regional and local origins of national housing policies (Lawson, forthcoming, Matznetter, 2007). Furthermore, there are recent comparative studies which attempt to comprehensively apply ideas encompassing market structures and contingent dynamics, historical processes of industrialisation (Fordist, post Fordist, regimes of accumulation), evolving state roles (market promoting, regulating or replacing) and welfare regimes (Bismarkian, Beveridge, conservative, neo-liberal, social democratic, Dalton, 2009, Schröder, 2008, Hoekstra, 2005, Smart, 2003).

As much of comparative housing research is necessarily conducted and funded by governments responding to nominated housing policy concerns, comparative housing research is often prompted by housing problems acknowledged by governments in order to (be seen to) propose **policy instruments** building on experience elsewhere. During the 2000s policy ‘issues’ have included measures to promote home ownership, financing arrangements for social housing providers, the social task and regulation of social landlords, success and failure in social inclusion, the redevelopment processes affecting large estates and efforts to promote more energy efficient dwellings spurning a range of international studies (Lawson and Milligan, 2007, Scanlon and Whitehead, 2007, Norris and Sheils, 2004). Most recently there has been a focus on appropriate regulatory and relief responses to rising levels of mortgage default (Stephens, 2008, Lawson, Parkinson and Wood, 2009).

Beyond policy research, comparative studies of tenure have also dominated comparative housing analysis, typically owner-occupation (OSIS, 2003) but also social renting (Whitehead and Scanlon, 2007, CECODHAS, 2008). Comparative research on tenure often involves collecting and presenting information on tenures which vary from country to country. Of course tenure is locally defined and many forms such as condominium living, shared ownership and social home ownership simply do not permit cross national comparison of similar tenures (Ruonavaara, 1993). However, beyond descriptive research, tenure has provided a launch pad for theoretical debate concerning questions of welfare provision (Castles, 1998, Kemeny, 2001) and competition (Kemeny, 2001, Haffner et al, 2009).

**Where to now?**

Comparative research needs explorers, empiricists, theorists and thrives on debate and criticism. The explorers discover, describe and report. Yet how and what they report filters subsequent interpretations and deductions and should always be carefully reviewed. It may be assumed that there

\(^2\) http://www.osis.bham.ac.uk/
\(^3\) http://www.demhow.bham.ac.uk/
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is less of a need for explorers as ‘territory’ becomes known. However, there are always changes in policies and structures to report on and for some countries there is still a shortage of housing system information in the international realm on countries from non-English speaking backgrounds. Language is an enormous filter and barrier to exchange, understanding and comparative analysis.

The first part of this paper argued that comparative analysis demands a disciplined approach to conceptualisation and research strategy. It is important to clarify not only the logic but also the nature of causality in housing and urban analysis and phenomena. Clarifying the aims of comparative research - to explain, predict, provoke fresh thinking etc needs to be probed more thoroughly by researchers, with methods appropriate to the purpose.

For those in the policy field, these challenges demand recognition of the limits of cross national generalisation and the constraints of universal housing ‘solutions’ and policy transference. Policy transfer and cross cultural learning are however an area of growing interest (Lawson, Parkinson, Wood, 2009, Gurran et al, 2008, Gillmore and Milligan, 2008, Berry and Whitehead, 2004). Studies need to put forward a more dedicated methodology – which is currently underdeveloped.

Despite the developments outlined above, a good deal of comparative housing research is vulnerable to the criticism that it is under-conceptualised with broad and often poorly structured descriptions rather than insightful analysis. Further the strategy employed is often confined by the short timelines and policy purpose of the study.

There are related debates about the nature of housing studies – is it a discipline or a field of study (see 2009 special issue of Housing Theory and Society on this) and how should we conceptualise “housing” as a phenomenon and “model” abstractions that are called “housing systems”. All of this can proceed independently of comparative analysis. However there is a case for a clearer interaction between ideas from this body of thinking and ideas currently applied to comparative methods. One way forward is the two stage retroductive model outlined in this paper. Unfortunately, there is very little interaction between debates on comparative methods in social sciences (e.g. Hantrais, 2009, Mahoney and Rauschmeyer, 2003, Smelser, 2002) with contemporary housing studies. There is a two way lack of engagement here: social science comparative methodologists ignoring housing and housing ignoring social science comparative methodologists.

This presentation encourages researchers to reflect on choices in research strategy, interact with cross disciplinary methodological debates and consider alternative theoretical developments in comparative research and contribute towards progress in the coming decade of comparative housing research. The key question must be addressed at an individual or research team level: where, as academics do we want to go with comparative research? Provide data, offer policy assistance, provide strategic evaluation, critique directions in housing provision or try to answer for fundamental questions that contribute to knowledge and understanding of the different housing situations we confront. There are also challenging and interesting directions which can pursued between very different regions of world (Ronald, 2008), whilst appreciating the importance of local contingent conditions amidst globalising forces.
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