# Housing Need Assessment and Policy Responses in Four European Secondary Cities

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# Introduction

European secondary cities are also struggling to accommodate people in need – amid limited resources and rising demand.

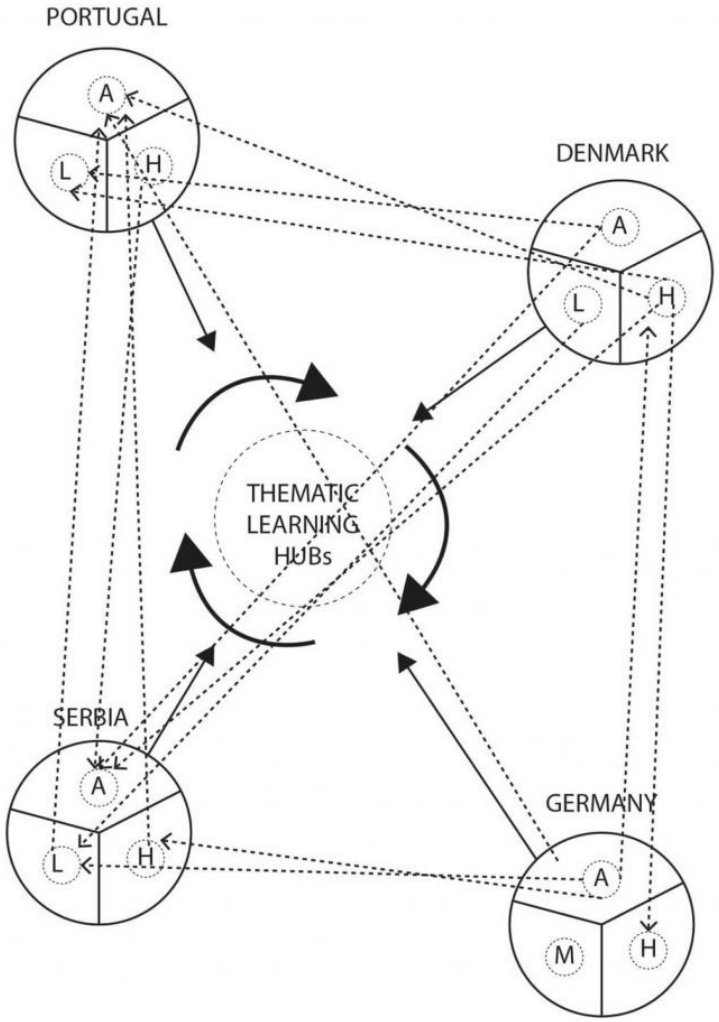
Research Inception

- DASH project - Deliver sAfe and Social Housing / Horizon Europe MCSA
- Exchange of knowledge between different nations, disciplines, sectors - academic institutions, local authorities and housing providers

Research focus

- How do secondary cities estimate their housing needs, and
- How are these estimates translated into local policy

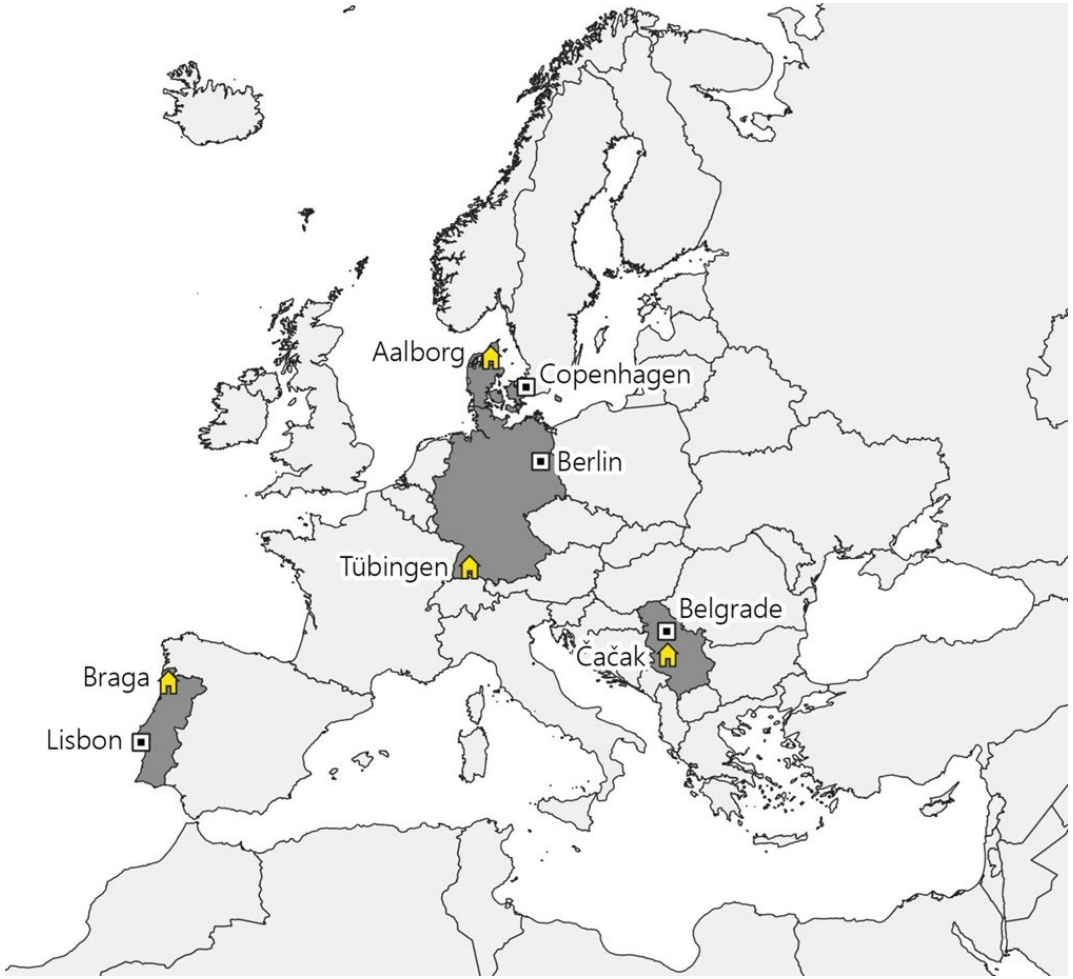
The aim of this study is to examine how different housing regimes and local policy priorities shape the ways housing needs are defined, estimated, and translated into local housing policy.




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# Methodology

- Comparative research across 4 European countries, in 4 secondary cities
  - Aalborg - Denmark
  - Braga - Portugal
  - Čačak - Serbia
  - Tübingen - Germany
- Data collection (2024–2025-2026)
- 19 semi-structured interviews
  - Deputy mayors and elected officials (2)
  - Municipal planning & social affairs departments (11)
  - Public & non-profit housing agencies (3)
  - Housing researchers (3)
- Field visits




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# Theory review

- Housing need: “Lacking housing of any kind or housed in ‘unsatisfactory’ circumstances” (Lawson et al., 2018, p. 55)
  - Inadequate physical house conditions
  - Mismatch or unsuitable for the household
  - Social needs
- Normative: what standards, for whom
- Current vs. future needs

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# The case of Čačak, RS

- High percentage of home ownership - 99.5%, mirroring the national average
- Social housing provision is based on ad hoc projects targeting the most vulnerable or key workers
- National Law defines who is eligible for social housing.
- Affordability issues are recognised but not addressed



| | |
|---|---|
| Population | 105.600 |
| Social housing | 0.5 % |
| Mass privatization | |

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# The case of Braga, PT

- Social housing is provided through national and EU programs
- Tiny local social housing stock: 1.2% of the total stock vs population growth




| | |
|---|---|
| Population | 200 000 |
| Social housing | 1.2 % (3% PT) |
| Growing population | |

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# The case of Tübingen, DE

- Acute housing shortage (localised); difficult access for vulnerable groups
- Limited residential mobility, esp. empty nesters, social housing, refugee housing
- Privatised social housing system; social function limited in time
- Issuing social housing eligibility certificates



| | |
|---|---|
| Population | 90 499 |
| Social housing | 3.1 % |
| Privatised social housing system | |

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# The case of Aalborg, DK

- Current housing need largely fulfilled
- Possibility to allocate 1 in every 4 non-profit housing, but much less needed
- Individual, case-by-case approach
- Monitoring “social mix” in social housing neighbourhoods on ‘prevention list’, affecting allocation policies (parallel society act)



| | |
|---|---|
| Population | 224 612 |
| Non-profit housing | 30 % |
| Post-industrial transformation | |

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# What is considered a housing need?

- **Individual and household level need**
  - Currently **without home** (homeless, asylum seekers, leaving prison or mental health institute)
  - **Cannot stay** (eviction-risk, partner violence, divorce, renovation works, …)
  - Current housing conditions **insufficient** (housing quality, overcrowding, housing not adapted to special needs)
- **Municipal level need (now – future)**
  - Sufficient number of housing units
  - Sufficient number of affordable housing units
  - Need for specific groups (key workers: Tübingen, Čačak; students: Aalborg; elderly: Tübingen, Aalborg)

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# What type of data are collected to estimate housing need?

| | Housing stock (current / future) | (Social) housing unit availability | Suitability for households | Affordability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aalborg | Regularly | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Braga | On demand | Yes | Yes for current, no monitoring of changes | Yes, linked to income and housing prices |
| Čačak | Census-based | Yes | Yes for current, no monitoring of changes | Yes for current, no monitoring of changes |
| Tübingen | Regularly | Partial | Incomplete | Yes, linked to housing prices |

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# Instruments for estimating housing need

| | Current needs | Future needs |
|---|---|---|
| Aalborg | Detailed statistical data; Waiting lists per housing area; Social mix monitoring (spatial distribution); Individual case referrals through social workers | Housing demand, with special attention to students and elderly; Social mix (spatial distribution) |
| Braga | Waiting lists | Statistical data and demographic information (fragmented) |
| Čačak | *Ad hoc* list for each social housing project | Digital platform at national level, though insufficiently functional; anticipation of vulnerable groups, young households and elderly |
| Tübingen | Data on social housing eligibility certificate issued (in Tübingen); Incomplete list for prioritization of urgent cases; Data on current refugees | Population projections, housing stock; focus on future elderly care needs; prognosis of (near) future refugees at higher level |

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# Comparative findings

METHODS OF HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Reflect the housing provision system

| | Housing system | Housing need estimation | Available data | Housing pressure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aalborg | Large (social) housing sector | monitoring population needs | Detailed statistics | low |
| Braga | Small social housing sector | monitoring waiting lists | Growing but incomplete | high |
| Čačak | Project-based provision | monitoring project applicants | Fragmented and incomplete | moderate |
| Tübingen | Privatized social housing system | eligibility certificates, priority criteria | Fragmented and incomplete | high |

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# Comparative findings

## LINK WITH LOCAL POLICY

- Imposed collection in order to get access to funds - Importance of higher-level funding (ad hoc in Serbia, more sustainable and long-term in Portugal)
- Heavy monitoring of data to assure ‘social mix’ (Aalborg) in relation to the Parallel society Act

Different policy objectives produce different housing needs assessments

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# Open questions / reflections

- When using different methods, is the same thing estimated?
- In what way do normative standards influence housing needs estimates?
- Do housing needs shape policy, or do housing systems shape what is recognised as housing need?

https://forms.gle/ZoSjwVve9gSDB3jD6

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# Thank you for your attention

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