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Council Housing in Poland. What Should We Do to Achieve its Goals?

Abstract

The subject of this paper is council housing in Poland. Currently, approximately 150 thousand flats are needed in Poland for households which live in poverty and meet the eligibility criteria, whereas approximately 6.5 thousand flats are completed yearly in the social housing construction sector, including also council housing construction, which is comparable to the period of 2011–2015.

The article analyses selected conditions necessary to achieve the goals of council housing in Poland. These conditions include: the demand for flats intended for tenancy on social terms as compared to the growth rate of the relevant housing stock; rents and living standards in such flats; the characteristics of their surroundings in terms of location and social neighbourhoods; social relations within such surroundings, and the specific nature of council housing management.

Key words: council (public) housing, council flats, council housing estates, social housing assistance

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Introduction

The subject of this paper is council housing (*mieszkalnictwo socjalne*). It is defined here as a set of measures undertaken by public administration bodies aimed at satisfying the housing needs of people with income persistently or temporarily too low to satisfy such needs on their own, at a minimum, yet not socially excluding, level. The tasks of council housing are handled by municipalities mainly in their own housing stock but also in private stock. Currently, after reforms of tenancy on social terms (*najem na warunkach socjalnych*) have been introduced, non-municipal social flats (*mieszkania społeczne*) may also be used for this purpose.

The performance of council housing tasks, including in particular the creation and tenancy of flats intended for people with low and very low income, is imposed on municipalities as their own task. In terms of the specific provisions of the Polish tenant rights protection act (dated 21 June 2001), the task is included in the general provision about the creation of conditions allowing for satisfying the housing needs among the locally governed community.

I consider council housing to be a (relatively autonomous) part of social housing (*mieszkalnictwo społeczne*). Of similar opinion are also, among others, Z. Rataj (2018, p. 63), M. Cesarski (2018, p. 14) or P. Lis (2018, p. 73).

The aim of this paper is to present a typology of the determinants affecting the achievement of council housing goals and to examine them in the context of the realities of the contemporary Polish society. Such a typology may not be exhaustive and therefore the considerations in this paper are limited to selected determinants directly affecting the achievement of the goals of this particular segment of the housing sector. The problems of, among others, the funding of council housing, including investment (see: Przymeński, 2019) as well as management and availability of land is set aside of the discussion undertaken in herein. In the paper, I assume a perspective wider than just a current diagnosis and so, elements of the theory of council housing are also touched upon.

For the purpose of this paper, I used data acquired in my previous research, including a programme² carried out together with Monika Oliwa-Ciesielska. I also use the current existing materials published by a number of public institutions, instruments of state and local law and statistical data.

The goal of council housing

The goal of council housing is defined differently for different models of the economic system and the corresponding housing policy models. The universal, general goal of council housing in developed market societies is to satisfy at least the basic housing needs

² Programme *Meeting housing and provisional housing needs of people and households with low and very low income in Poland and the processes of their social de-marginalisation*. The programme was funded by the National Science Centre (N N114 163940) and carried out from 19.05.2011 to 18.01.2014.

of people and families at risk of housing exclusion. It is one of the conditions for them to participate in society, including to perform their respective social roles.

Pursuant to Article 20 of the Polish Constitution, the foundation of the economic system in the Republic of Poland is social market economy. This places the social policy pursued in Poland in the socio-liberal model, which is also called, among others, the social security model or the motivation model. Apart from Poland, certain versions of it are followed in many European countries, including Germany, Austria and France. A more extensive review of social policy models as implemented in various economic and political systems as well as the corresponding theoretical considerations are beyond the scope of this paper³. The adoption of a specific model of social policy, including social housing assistance, is necessary as such a model sets out the system of values on which they should be based and allows for the consistency of measures within them. In Poland, they are laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (among others, Articles 67 and 75) as well as in statutes, especially in the Social Assistance Act (dated 12 March 2004), which sets out general principles of providing assistance to citizens by public administration institutions, and in the tenant rights protection act (dated 21 June 2001). With regard to the issues discussed in this paper, these principles may be interpreted as follows:

1. Housing assistance should have the effect of providing households at risk of housing exclusion⁴ with housing conditions at the level of the minimal socially acceptable norm (normality). Such circumstances should motivate them to expend effort to improve their living conditions, to the extent possible, on their own. As a principle, the provision of assistance funded by public means should not lead to a situation where the beneficiary is provided with conditions better than a citizen who is not eligible for such assistance.
2. The goal of council housing is to reduce the social exclusion determinants that are related to poor living conditions⁵, including those which are generated by the social neighbourhoods around and spatial location of the dwellings rented out to them.
3. Housing assistance, in particular in form of tenancy on social terms, is addressed to low- and very-low-income households⁶, i.e. households which respect the norms and values creating the social order. The assistance addressed to troubled households, i.e. people adopting anti-social forms of living, is a more complex and separate subject of considerations and practice.

The goals of council housing pursued by public administration in Poland are included in the National Housing Programme adopted (on 27.09.2016) by the Government. The general goal of the Programme is to improve the housing conditions of the society,

³ My view of the essence of social policy and its models has been shaped under the influence of the classics of Polish social policy, A. Rajkiewicz and M. Książopolski (e.g. Rajkiewicz et al., 1998).

⁴ This regards also the homeless who are capable of living within the accepted norms.

⁵ An extensive list of them is provided by the ETHOS typology, FEANTSA (2017).

⁶ More about the difference between low and very low-income households and troubled households was presented by: M. Oliwa-Ciesielska, in: Przymeński, Oliwa-Ciesielska (2014), p. 47–51, Galor, Goryńska-Bittner, Kalinowski (eds) (2014).

especially by expanding social housing construction. Council housing is directly referred to in Measure 2 of the Programme, i.e. to raise the ability to satisfy the basic housing needs of people at risk of social exclusion due to low income or particular hardship (the Ministry of Development 2020).

The measures to achieve the goal

Council housing, the primary activity of which is to create and rent out flats, is in Poland an important part of a wider system of social housing assistance (SPM). The measures applied by SPM include pecuniary benefits (housing or electricity benefits, rent reductions) or benefits provided in kind, i.e. as tenancy of flats on social terms. Only three measures of housing assistance are applied exclusively in the field of council housing: two forms of tenancy on social terms and rent reductions.

The temporary rent reduction, introduced in the tenant rights protection act (dated 21 June 2001, Article 7(1)), may be applied by municipalities with regard to tenants of municipal dwellings regardless of whether they have been occupied already before or only after the changes of the law governing the terms of tenancy. Tenancy on social terms (*najem na warunkach socjalnych*) has two forms, both of which have considerably changed since 24.04.2019, i.e. following the amendment of the above-mentioned law (see: Przymeński, 2019). Following the amendments, these forms are: fixed term social tenancy (*najem socjalny*) and indefinite term tenancy (*najem na czas nieoznaczony*) (Articles 21(3), 21b(1) and others). Their characteristics and differences between them are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Two forms of tenancy on social terms in Poland, after changes in law

Criteria of differences	Fixed term social tenancy	Indefinite term tenancy
Beneficiaries	Households with very low income; the upper limit of the income is specified by the municipality	Households with low income; the upper and lower limit of the income is specified by the municipality
Term of tenancy	Fixed term (Article 5(1)), usually 1 year; the tenancy agreement may be terminated, including by changing the tenancy form, or extended for another period, if the tenant's circumstances continue to meet the eligibility criteria (Article 23)	Indefinite term (Articles 5(1), 20(1)), but since 21.04.2019, the municipality verifies, no more often than once per 2.5 years, whether the tenants meet the income requirement; if the income of the tenant's household exceeds the criteria, the municipality may withdraw from tenancy on social terms and increase the rent (Article 21c(1), (5), (6))
Payment of a deposit to secure the tenancy liabilities	Deposit not required (Article 6(1))	Deposit may be required to sign the tenancy agreement (Article 6(1))

Source: Author, based on the Act dated 21 June 2001, as amended. See also: Przymeński, 2019.

Provisional (council) accommodation (*pomieszczenie tymczasowe*) may be deemed an instrument of temporary social below par housing assistance rather than social housing assistance. They are not measures of council housing as such as they are intended for achieving a different goal. Provisional accommodations, introduced by the tenant rights protection act (Article 2(5)) are usually premises with a lower standard, intended for short-term tenancy. They are usually a means to facilitate eviction. Also sheltered accommodation (*mieszkania chronione*) may not be deemed to be a measure of council housing. These are provided as part of different procedures and with a different goal than flats rented out on social terms. They are part of social assistance (the Act dated 12 March 2004, Article 53), aimed at preparing residents, under the supervision of experts, to live independently, or are a replacement for an institution providing 24-hour care.

Matching the number of flats to the demand

The demand among society for flats rented out under tenancy on social terms⁷ is expressed in the number of applications filed for this type of assistance. The categories of “households waiting for tenancy” estimated by the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) include households meeting the eligibility criteria specified in resolutions of Municipality Councils. This type of demand is not equal to the effective demand in economic terms. Consequently, information about it may not be acquired from the market, but from Municipal Offices instead. The number of this type of applications as estimated by GUS (2018b, 2019b)⁸, concerning both forms of tenancy on social terms, is presented in Table 2. As GUS has been disclosing full information in this regard only recently (since 2017)⁹, it is impossible to analyse its dynamics.

The data in Table 2 allow for a conclusion that the total number of flats would have to be almost doubled to satisfy the demand for tenancy of council flats in 2017 and 2018 on the national scale (setting aside local differences). In 2017 and 2018, and the situation is similar also currently, the demand for flats rented out by municipalities on social terms (in both forms) could have been satisfied mainly by increasing the stock of dwellings intended for this purpose, primarily by construction. This is because dwellings in the municipal stock that are fit for living are already occupied, of which, for flats rented out for indefinite term, the majority is rented on “old” terms, i.e. without the right to verify the tenant’s income. Given the circumstances, the fact that municipalities have been selling out dwellings from the stock which may not be used for the purposes of current housing

⁷ The changes of law introduced in the recent years reforming the conditions of tenancy on social terms introduced an option to grant this type of benefit not only in the municipal stock, but also in the social housing stock and in private homes. See also: Przymeński, 2019.

⁸ It is difficult to carry out these necessary estimations due to the variety of procedures applied by municipalities when granting this type of benefits, e.g. different eligibility criteria or different ways to open or to temporarily suspend the registers of beneficiaries.

⁹ Previous to the GUS estimates, and contradicting each other, numbers regarding the demand are presented in: Suszyńska & Muczyński, 2018, p. 139.

assistance, the trend present for a long time, was not an alarming situation, although it is at the same time acknowledged that it is necessary to increase the stock of flats available under tenancy on social terms.

Table 2. Households in Poland waiting for tenancy on social terms in 2017–2018 and the number of council and municipal flats (*lokale socjalne i lokale komunalne*) in use¹⁰, in thousands

Year	Waiting for tenancy of a council flat (fixed term social tenancy)	Waiting for tenancy of municipal flat (indefinite term tenancy)	Waiting households in total	Number of council flats	Number of municipal flats
2017	90.3	63.9	154.2	98.6	869
2018	85.9	63.4	149.3	101.2	840

Source: GUS (2018b) *Gospodarka mieszkaniowa w latach 2013–2017* (Housing Management in 2013–2017), p. 46 and others; GUS (2019) *Rocznik statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Polish Statistical Yearbook), p. 329; GUS (2019) *Gospodarka mieszkaniowa w 2018 roku* (Housing Management in 2018), p. 6.

The demand for dwellings available within council housing may be also decreased by limiting economic poverty in Poland and facilitating the access to non-subsidised social tenements (at full rent) to those households which have become better-off. In terms of accessibility, the nearest scheme of social housing construction, which could be a bridge between council/municipal and non-subsidised housing, is the Home Plus Programme (M+), together with the Home for Start Programme (MnS) (the Act dated 20 July 2018) which provides for rent benefits. Both the programmes, addressed to lower-income tenants, are under implementation and do not create a new situation, which may be demonstrated by the data in Table 3.

The data in Table 3 show that the number of social flats completed in 2016–2019 slightly decreased as compared to 2011–2015. When comparing the number of completed municipal flats (approx. 1.8 thousand per year) with the demand for tenancy on social terms (approx. 150 thousand), it may be concluded that the effects of municipal housing construction covered the demand only to an inconsiderable extent. Nevertheless, the slight annual growth of the number of municipal flats ready for use, the use by municipalities of the option of tenancy in dwellings other than the municipal stock, the improvement of income levels in society, as well as other reasons, all have the effect that the demand for tenancy on social terms is slightly dropping. According to GUS, the demand has been dropping since 2014. Yet, it still remains high, mainly in large cities, where 85.9% of the waiting individuals live. (GUSb, 2018, pp. 46–47).

¹⁰ Since 21.04.2019, fixed social tenancy has stopped to be tied to council homes and council homes have stopped their existence as a special pool of homes (see also: Przyemeński, 2019).

Table 3. Number of flats completed, in thousands

Year	Municipal flats	Social tenement flats (TBS and M+)	Housing cooperative flats	Social flats in total	Flats in total
2011–2015 on average per year	2.2	1.5	3.4	7.1	144
2015	1.7	1.3	2.1	5.1	147.7
2016	1.8	1.3	2.7	5.8	163.3
2017	1.7	1.5	2.3	5.5	178.3
2018	1.9	1.5	3.0	6.4	185.1
2019	1.8	2.5	2.1	6.4	207.2

Source: GUS (2018a) Rocznik statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Polish Statistical Yearbook), p. 336; GUS (2019) Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Polish Statistical Yearbook), p. 331; GUS (2020) Budownictwo mieszkaniowe w okresie I–XII 2019 (Residential Construction from January to December 2019).

Some ways to reduce the demand for flats rented on social terms, not mentioned before and of more substitute nature, are also created by the market. They emerge in the business sector of rooms for rent, including in forms similar to the workers' hostels as we know them from the past. According to H. Milewska-Wilk (2017), it is the part of the rental market with the fastest rate of professionalisation. Middle-term rental of this type is addressed to a certain category of people looking for cheap flats, i.e. those who are “temporary and not settled”, usually young people with potential to grow, such as students and working migrants. This part of the market is assumed to be separate from council housing, it is possible though for some tenants to apply for social housing assistance in form of housing benefits to be used also on this market. It has potential to reduce a certain number of people waiting for tenancy on social terms, especially once the ways to provide housing benefits is reformed, but may not replace council housing in its fundamental functions.

Adjusting the usable standards of dwellings

The flats rented out by municipalities on social terms should have relatively low standards, which, however, still meet the norms of the changing culture of housing in Poland, including also the needs of people with disabilities and families with children. It is the necessary condition for achieving the goal of council housing. This principle does not contradict the municipalities' need to hold a certain stock of sub-standard dwellings, which are an instrument to discipline those tenants who breach the terms of tenancy and violate the rules of neighbourly coexistence, which happens much more often in the municipal

stock than in the dwellings of other landlords. The current regulations of the tenant rights protection law and regulations adopted by municipal bodies allow to effect tenancy on social terms in dwellings with a lower standard, including to rent out separate rooms in one flat to several tenants (the Act dated 21 June 2001, Article 22, and based thereupon, e.g. the Resolution No. XXX/443//VII/2016 of the City Council of Poznań). Although such use of sub-standard dwellings usually raises no doubts, the practice of renting them out to households with no social dysfunctions, including people with disabilities or at old age, is problematic. This issue is examined, among others, by Z. Rataj (2011 and 2013), it is also reflected in the contemporary journalism.

Let us note that the majority of municipalities have been for years declaring actions to improve the conditions in their housing stock. Exhaustive information in this regard, however, may not be presented here as there are no updated publications on this topic. The condition of council housing will be probably presented by GUS in a statistical description resulting from the National Census planned for 2021.

In 2018, the average usable floor area of a completed municipal flat was 40.7 sq. m, as compared to 49.2 sq. m for a non-subsidised social flat (GUS, 2019a, p. 332).

Adjusting rents

In council housing, rent is determined not with reference to any market parameters but with consideration of the actual income of the social category of households which are at risk of housing exclusion.

In both forms of tenancy on social terms, rent should be lower not only than market rents but also than rents applied in (non-subsidised) social flats. As fixed term social tenancy is addressed to households with the lowest income, while indefinite term tenancy to those with slightly higher means, rents in both those forms of tenancy differ from each other in that they are higher in the latter form (see: Table 1). Pursuant to the tenant rights protection act (dated 21 June 2001), rent per 1 sq. m in the case of fixed term social tenancy may not exceed half the lowest rent applicable in the municipal housing stock (Article 23(4)), i.e. in the dwellings rented out as indefinite term tenancy.

Pursuant to the above regulation, rents in social flats are higher than in flats rented on social terms by municipalities. They are not regulated or subsidised by municipalities and cover all the costs of their construction and use, including the repayment of building loans. Let us note that the reconstruction costs (*koszty odtworzeniowe*) of non-subsidised social flats are higher than those of municipal flats, which reflects the difference in the usable standards of those dwellings. Rents in social flats are, as a principle, lower than in flats rented on the open market, as these must cover the landlord's profit in addition to the rent charged by the administration.

To answer the question about the approximate relation of rents in the municipal stock as compared to flats rented on the open market, in February 2020 the author reviewed examples of actual values of such rents in Poznań. The research revealed that the average full rent for a flat on the open market at that time in Poznań amounted to approx.

PLN 45 per sq. m¹¹, which accounts for the landlord's profit and administration rent, excluding utility charges. According to the information published by the municipal company managing the housing stock in Poznań (Zarząd Komunalnych Zasobów Mieszkaniowych sp. z o.o., 2020), the monthly rent in the municipal stock, depending on the so-called rent zone, amounted to PLN 4.90 up to 12.90 per sq. m. For the needs of this paper, it is sufficient to say that the average rent charged by the city for indefinite term tenancy of a municipal dwelling was approx. PLN 9 per sq. m, so it was 5 times lower on average than the market levels. For flats rented under fixed social tenancy, the cost of tenancy could not exceed PLN 2.45 per sq. m. Thus, it was fixed at a level 18 times lower than the market prices. In both forms of tenancy on social terms, if needed and at the tenant's request, municipalities may reduce the rent temporarily. Let us note, however, that the services covered by tenancy in a council flat and on the open market are not the same, as in the latter case, unlike in the former, it usually regards a dwelling with furniture, with a higher standard and with better surroundings.

Limiting the negative impact of social and spatial surroundings

A significant role in the task of housing de-marginalisation of council tenants is assigned to the surroundings in terms of social neighbourhoods and spatial location¹² of the flats rented out to them, regardless of whether they are dispersed in space or are gathered in homogeneous clusters. Such surroundings are made of both the social relations emerging within them, as well as their urban, technical and architectural status.

In homogeneous, in terms of community and location, clusters of households using housing assistance provided by municipalities, the nearest or near neighbourhood are the residents of the same block of flats or housing estate. Further range of the community are "non-council" neighbourhoods, usually resided by households with a higher social status. Both communities construct an image of their neighbours which affects their mutual relations and the outlining of a distance between them. The potential of negative stigmatisation of council tenants stems from the mere fact of their poverty and need to use public assistance, which is only emphasised by them living in separate council buildings¹³. It is additionally reinforced by information about relatively frequent violations of public

¹¹ The calculations were made on 17 February 2020 based on the first 30 rental offers at the website Ogłoszenia Gratka. The homes offered in the analysed offers included 18 1-bedroom flats, 7 studio flats and 5 2-bedroom flats.

¹² More on how the external effects and neighbourhood affect the quality of living, from the point of view of urban economics, see: M. E. Sokołowicz (2017), pp. 129–134.

¹³ Research by M. Oliwa-Ciesielska reveals that neighbours of council housing estates usually distinguish poverty, including poverty of people who may not be blamed for their difficult situation, from intentional behaviours that may be called social pathology, and, disregarding extreme views, their negative assessment of the community of residents of council buildings is usually moderate and blurred or even is not expressed at all. They are focused on the behaviour of specific individuals. Nevertheless, the mere distinction of that community from their neighbourhood, both by its members and its "non-council" neighbours, as well as distance towards it tinged with more or less

order in such neighbourhoods which disturb the life of those neighbours who expect peace and security and give reason for police interventions (e.g. Kukuła & Dudziak, 2013; Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014).

These circumstances are of importance because they may create an oppressive neighbourhood community which impedes or even completely prevents the achievement of the goals of council housing. A lack of adequate response to it is always a clear failure of incompetent municipal administration. A spectacular example of it were the events in Nowa Sól, which in 2015 appalled the national public opinion after a material published by the TV channel TVN24 (2015). When commenting on the air about the tenants devastating council homes (units) in part of a council housing estate, the then mayor of the town asked: “– Should we continue to help those who turned flats given by the town council into a pigsty? Those who ripped off and sold doors, boilers, heaters, taps and stoves? Help them? What to do with them?” When analysing the situation more closely, it turned out that the devastation and other behaviours menacing to the rest of the tenants took place only in a part of the estate, and they were the result of a risky selection of its residents. Despite that risk, the units devastated for 4 years were not effectively (or at all) supervised by the municipal services. A hypothesis could be made that the lack of intervention of municipal services was the main reason of the continuity of anti-social behaviours among part of the tenants. The only opinion of the mayor that may be considered just, however still too far-going, is that there are no instruments with which the municipality may decisively and legally carry out such interventions.

When, for various possible reasons, oppressive conditions in the community emerge, it is impossible to pursue the goals of social housing. If this is the case, instead of help in housing de-marginalisation, we only see repression for poverty, which in the case of the majority of council tenants is not their fault. The clusters of council tenants all over the world constitute a space of forced coexistence of diversified households whose shared characteristic is economic poverty¹⁴. This is why, according to M. Oliwa-Ciesielska, the social circumstances of people in need of assistance in having a flat require the emphasis of their diversity instead of homogenisation (Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, p. 192).

There is no clear answer to the question whether the measures aimed at housing de-marginalisation are more effective when council tenants are concentrated in small buildings or even estates or when they are dispersed within non-council flats and tenants. It depends on a concurrence of many determinants¹⁵, as well as on how this task is carried out. Experience, especially foreign, definitely shows that council housing projects pursued in enormous, homogeneous housing estates or large, multi-storey buildings must be abandoned. Regardless of the intention of their originators, they only impede

negative appraisals, is a fact (Oliwa-Ciesielska, in: Przymeński, Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 27–28 and others).

¹⁴ More about communities of council tenants in Poland, see: Przymeński, in: Przymeński, Oliwa-Ciesielska (2014) pp. 163–168 and others; Przymeński (2016), pp. 22–23.

¹⁵ For example, in the USA, the problem of housing marginalisation and poverty coincides with the problem of racial prejudice (e.g. Bennett et al., 2006).

the achievement of council housing goals, and additionally they are risky for the whole society as they create communities which are an incubator of anti-social behaviours. They accumulate issues resulting in social separation and stigmatisation of their residents, and facilitate their ghettoisation/slumisation.

The most often named drawbacks of such estates, particularly in the countries where the biggest of them were constructed (Italy, France, USA), are: failure to complete fully the assumed projects; poor materials and workmanship, often caused by economic fraud during the construction works; quick technical devastation of the estates; failure to implement assumptions of the architects and urban planners, impossible to be implemented and idealistic, regarding the creation of “a new type of social ties”¹⁶, taking over “the criminal control” (Kukuła & Dudziak, 2013) over the majority of tenants by an aggressive minority capable of joining forces and acting together. This does not mean, however, that such large clusters have no benefits for their residents, which is reflected in the movements for their defence and attempts of improvement (Smith, 2006). The most important ones include: their cultural homogeneity and the mere, trivial fact of having a home, which could be at risk if the neighbourhoods or estates occupied by them were to be demolished or regenerated, which actually happened in the USA (Bennett et al., 2006).

As mentioned before, better conditions for housing de-marginalisation of households with low and very low income may be created in small clusters of flats rented out on social terms or if they are dispersed within other types of housing stock. A strength of the first option may be relative ease of establishing effective and equal ties with neighbours of similar status, to which council tenants themselves refer positively, if only such neighbours have positive traits of character. According to M. Oliwa-Ciesielska, the basis for such choices is the expected solidarity in poverty (Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 10–11, 23–25). Let us note, however, that council tenants judge the neighbourhood of other tenants in an ambivalent way. When referring to the context of the realities of everyday life, they also express negative opinions which mainly regard those co-residents who violate the neighbourhood life rules preferred by themselves (see also: Oliwa-Ciesielska, in: Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014; Rataj, 2011). Opinions about poor neighbours are ambivalent, yet with positive potential which may be used to create a well-functioning neighbourhood.

The option to locate flats rented on social terms within small clusters has also other advantages:

1. it allows to reduce the administration costs as compared to certain situations in which the flats are dispersed,
2. it facilitates contacts between the residents and social assistance institutions, which, through the social workers operating on-site, perform their tasks expanded by social work also for the benefit of the community,
3. it makes it easier to control anti-social behaviours of the tenants.

¹⁶ An excellent work on this topic: Di Biagi, 2008; see also: Zubrzycka-Czarnecka, 2011, pp. 79–84.

In the case of the other option, in which housing de-marginalisation is pursued with dispersed dwellings and council tenants, its potential to develop has been still unrecognised in Poland. Under regulations introduced within last years, municipalities may provide housing assistance in stock not belonging to them. Apart from subletting dwellings from private stock to council tenants, which has been practised for a long time, municipalities may also sign contracts with companies building social flats (TBS, M+), under which these companies may provide the municipalities with flats intended for tenancy on social terms in exchange for funding part of the construction costs (see also: Przymeński, 2019). The future will show whether this practice will be pursued more in the model of small clusters or the model of dispersion of council tenants. The experience so far shows that the latter option, in addition to positive factors, may also activate negative factors of the process of housing de-marginalisation. These are:

1. In the dispersion model, the risk of alienation of council tenants among households with a higher social status does not disappear (Oliwa-Ciesielska, in: Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 12–13 and others).
2. Examples of failed programmes of dispersing council tenants may be found in Chicago, where in the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, the municipal administration, looking for an alternative for demolished or renovated occupied buildings within large council housing estates, provided a selected group of their tenants with an option to find a flat on the open market on their own and gave them a money voucher to subsidise the rent. The initiative failed because the landlords and the community recognised the low social status of the programme beneficiaries (who paid with the vouchers) and accepted neither the fact that flats are rented out to them nor their neighbourhood, including also due to racial prejudice (Przymeński, in: Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 137–139; Wilen & Stassel, 2006, pp. 240–250).
3. In many towns in Poland, projects in which municipalities sublet dwellings rented by themselves in private stock to council tenants did not bring any improvement in terms of housing de-marginalisation because the dwellings were often located in ruined buildings, and their living standards were often lower than in the municipal stock.

Not only the community but also the location of the buildings or estates with the function of council housing within the urban area affects the abilities to effectively fulfil these functions. Research by M. Oliwa-Ciesielska shows that council tenants have their own preferences in this regard, which should be known to and respected by urban planners. The tenants usually do not want the buildings or estates created for them to be located within suburban areas, or within isolated areas which are poorly communicated with the centre. On the contrary, they prefer their flats to be located in developed, unfenced urban areas (Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 19–20 and others). Furthermore, research by Z. Rataj reveals that if it is possible or necessary, they are against concentrating council housing in their neighbourhood. In July 2010, she noted an event¹⁷ where the residents

¹⁷ The author received information about this event from dr Zuzanna Rataj, who in July 2010 carried out field research in Poznań council housing estates for the purposes of her master's thesis (Rataj, 2011).

of a council housing estate, Darzybór, in Poznań, in fear of their own safety, applied to the municipal authorities (in an application made together with their non-council neighbours) for withdrawal from the plan to locate council residential containers (units) for problematic council tenants within the neighbourhood.

The above shows that the plans of development of areas in which council housing dwellings are located should take into account the need to lift barriers between them and non-council neighbourhoods. This may be facilitated by locating infrastructural elements in a space encouraging to use them together and equally by both council and non-council neighbours. Such measures are necessary although they require an ability to break the ice because, depending on the situation, the isolation tendency may be present not only in the community of better-off households towards council tenants but also the other way round.

Competent management of the council housing stock

The achievement of the goals of council housing requires competent management, not only in terms of standard administration of housing stock but also social problems, the range and frequency of which are greater than in other types of housing stock. The administration of buildings with dwellings covered by tenancy on social terms should have appropriate expert knowledge and possibility of legal sanctions against tenants who make it impossible for the remaining residents to normally use their dwellings. Such sanctions include: termination of the tenancy agreement, including consequences such as allocation of a flat with a lower standard, transfer to any form of a social hostel or even a homeless shelter, etc. Tenancy on social terms is a form of a benefit which, as any other social benefit, has a secondary but important function of an instrument of social pedagogy and social control (see also: Frieske, 2010; Przymeński, 2017).

The contemporary knowledge about managing the stock of social housing, especially municipal housing, entails a directive to support tenants' participation. It corresponds with the idea of democratisation of their management, which includes the formation of proper relations between tenants and the administration, including their participation in decision-making with regard to the buildings occupied by them and their surroundings. The tenants' participation may increase their chance to identify with the specific neighbourhood and community. According to M. Oliwa-Ciesielska, in clusters of council tenants, the lack of readiness to take up any intervention against the observed bad behaviours results from the fear for own safety, not from indifference. Reactions to wrong things happening in the nearest neighbourhood are usually at the cost of direct conflicts and stigmatisation of the reacting ones (Przymeński & Oliwa-Ciesielska, 2014, pp. 193–194). Good management must level out the deficit of informal social control in these neighbourhoods.

Research by K. Suszyńska and Z. Rataj (2017) shows that the majority of residents of municipal housing estates (69%) is ready to get involved in activities for the local community. The sense of having impact on the neighbourhood is necessary for the residents to organise themselves and act against the ghettoisation of that neighbourhood. The sense of helplessness and menace, combined with the passive attitude of the administration,

works otherwise. In the light of the possible positive effects of the tenants' participation in the communities created in municipal housing stock and the deficit and poor formal acknowledgement of such activities in Poland, Suszyńska and Rataj propose that legal regulations be introduced to make such participation part of the currently applicable management systems of such housing stock (Suszyńska & Rataj, 2017, p. 141).

Conclusions

1. The effectiveness of measures applied within council housing should be evaluated based on the achievement of its goals. The analysis of economic expenditure ratios or current statistics is insufficient in this regard.
2. The basic benefits of council housing in Poland are still provided under the discretionary (*uznaniowy*) care model. In the light of Poland's level of socio-economic development, the shift of the benefit model from discretionary to obligatory is an urgent matter.
3. The incapability to satisfy the demand for tenancy on social terms is reflected in the deficit of approximately 150 thousand dwellings which would have to be allocated by municipalities to those benefits, as well as the lack of means to fund the costs of their daily use.
4. The demand for tenancy on social terms may be reduced by: increasing municipal stock of dwellings, improving the financial condition of households, as well as increasing the number of constructed social dwellings, particularly within the M+ programme complementary to council housing, together with the Living on Your Own (MnS) programme of rent benefits.
5. Council housing in Poland, similarly to the entire housing assistance policy, is now under changes, including with regard to the principles of tenancy on social terms and implementation of new social housing schemes.
6. Under new and old social housing schemes, up to and including 2019, (slightly) fewer social flats were built as compared to the period 2011–2015.
7. So far, the M+ programme aimed at the construction of flats for rent, with a lot of governmental propaganda publicity, has brought no material effects, although certain revival in this regard could have been observed in 2019 (see: Table 3).
8. The low scale of social housing construction up to 2019 corresponds with the low status of the Department of Housing in the Ministry of Development (as well as in the predecessors of this institution). Its tasks, including the development of social housing, are not part of the main mission of the Ministry, which is currently “to increase the efficiency of the Polish business by the development of innovative solutions” (Ministerstwo Rozwoju, 2020).
9. Traditional council housing, so far based mainly on municipal housing stock, after the introduction of more flexibility for municipalities to acquire dwellings for tenancy on social terms, may change its nature by using social housing stock of other landlords.

10. The goals of council housing may be attained in two options regarding the concentration of flats rented out on social terms: small clusters or dispersion among the neighbourhood and community. Decisions in this regard require an analysis of experience and academic research.
11. In Poland, the failed social housing construction in the recent years, including 2015–2019, accompanies a good condition of the housing construction sector on the open market, which operates for the benefit of households in a better financial condition (see: Table 3).

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