

Ray Forrest and Ngai-Ming Yip (Eds.)(2013)

Young People and Housing: Transitions, Trajectories and Generational Fractures.

London: Routledge, pp.243, £34.99.

This book was published as part of a 'housing and society' series, edited by Ray Forrest, for Routledge. Its focus on young people and housing derived directly from a specially organised seminar held at City University, Hong Kong in 2011 which brought together eleven invited academics working in this area. The background to the seminar was a concern that young people were facing increasing difficulties in accessing appropriate housing across a wide range of societies. The seminar, and book, aimed to explore this assumption, looking at institutional, economic, and cultural factors that may influence this trend. The eleven contributors cover eleven countries, five in Europe (Ireland, Sweden, Greece, Italy and France); four in East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China); Russia; and Australia. The rationale for the selection of the countries is not clear and would have benefited from some explanation, although it certainly provides a rich and interesting volume.

The book begins with an introductory chapter by Forrest, 'Making sense of the housing trajectories of young people'. Forrest's essay provides a wide-ranging and insightful review of what is known about housing for young people, providing both a historical and international perspective. He makes the important point that analysts need to be careful about focusing on a contemporary and ethnocentric perspective. The literature covered in this chapter provides a useful basis for understanding the material covered in later chapters.. For example, it considers the degree to which extended transitions and longer periods in the parental home are problematic or not, and the extent to which structure does or does not influence people's early life-courses (in contrast to theories of individualisation that emphasis the role of culture, lifestyles and personal projects). Whilst most of this discussion focuses on the impact of social and economic change on all young people, Forrest does emphasis the likely differences within youth cohorts, noting that 'the apparently independent may be more vulnerable than the dependent' (p.9), and that the ability to survive changing circumstances will be shaped by access to both material and social resources. Although not explicitly addressed in the chapter, all of these factors are key contextual factors to an examination of youth homelessness, and will therefore be of interest to homelessness researchers.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts; the family, demography, and the transition to adulthood (Chapters 2 to 5); housing affordability and youth housing trajectories (Chapters 6 to 8); and economic change and generational fractures (Chapters 9 to 12). These three themes are not immediately obvious and feel as though they have, to some extent, been imposed upon diverse chapters, although as one reads the volume the pattern becomes a little clearer. Within each section, a number of countries are covered, again with no obvious reason for the country groupings. A more detailed introduction to these chapters would have been useful for the reader.

Within the first part of the book, Chapter 2 (Emmanuel) looks at the role of family and increasing levels of co-residence with parents in the Southern European model in Athens. In a fascinating paper, he argues that both the role of 'familism' and the shift in values, norms and lifestyles associated with the Second Demographic Transition have both exerted influence on young people's housing pathways, with increasing proportions of young people remaining in the parental home, and delayed marriage amongst those aged 19-33. Further, this has occurred across social class, with economic hardship and housing deprivation a feature of the outcome for lower income households. Chapter 3 is complementary to Chapter 2, examining the first steps on the housing ladder in Italy and family intergenerational transfers. Poggio argues for the salience of intergenerational transfers and how they may shape inter-cohort inequality, potentially widening existing social inequalities. This chapter also examines the independent housing options for young people showing how young people with no or restricted family support, including migrants, often have to struggle with both insecure and low paid employment and high housing costs. Chapter 4 takes a broader brush and examines the housing transitions of young people in Australia, looking at both changes and continuities in recent years (Beer and Faulkner). Analysis reveals that young Australians (25-34 year olds) are actually entering home ownership at a younger age than previous generations, but that some are also exiting it soon after, highlighting an increasing risk of default on mortgages. Finally, in this section, Chapter 5 focuses on the living arrangements of just-married young adults in Taiwan (Li). It demonstrates that sharing housing with parents is a major living arrangement for young people when they get married, with more young people dependent on their parents than a previous cohort. This reflects cultural norms and also the resources available to young people, with those with higher economic status more likely to live outside the parental home.

Part II of the book deals with housing affordability and begins with a chapter on young people's housing and exclusion in Sweden (Lieberg). This chapter shows that young people are leaving home somewhat later in life than previously (though still much younger than most European countries), and that increased housing costs and changes in the housing market are factors in this, along with prolonged studies. A (too) short section on homelessness reports that young people with experience of homelessness

usually leave home earlier than their peers. In some contrast, Chapter 7 focuses on homeownership in Hong Kong for the post-eighties generation (Yip). Within a context of familism as the cultural norm, again growing proportions of young people are living in the parental home. Prolonged education, falling salaries and a property boom have made it more difficult for young people to enter home ownership, with differentiation among young people increasing and inter-generational transfers becoming increasingly pivotal for young buyers. Chapter 8 examines the significant housing problems faced by young people in Chinese cities (Zhu). Neoliberalized housing development policy in China has led to 'serious housing affordability problems' for young people, including for the young middle class, to the extent that the author warns there could be a major social crisis if these housing problems are not addressed by government.

Part III of the book is concerned with generational fractures and begins with a consideration of this process in Japan (Hirayama). This chapter (9) demonstrates that economic decline and the rise of a neoliberal housing policy have made it increasingly difficult for young people to participate in the established 'home-owner' society. The author argues that Japan's low fertility rate can be partly explained by reduced opportunities for new family housing/ formation, and it is therefore a social sustainability issue as well as a housing policy problem. Two chapters then follow on the European situation, firstly focussing on the French generational gap (Chapter 10; Bugeja-Bloch) and secondly on young people's trajectories since the late 1960s in Ireland (Chapter 11; Norris and Winston). Bugeja-Bloch demonstrates that there are strong inter and intra- generational inequalities in housing. Norris and Winston focus on headship rates (by young people) since the 1960s, showing how they declined in the 1980s following economic recession but recovered in late 1990s/ early 2000s as the labour market context improved. However, young people borrowed much higher amounts than their predecessors and face much higher lifetime debt-servicing costs than previous generations. The final chapter examines the lived experience of housing among young people in Russia (Chapter 12; Zavisca). Drawing on qualitative work, Zavisca graphically depicts the constrained housing opportunities available to young Russians, (who mainly live in home owner properties headed by parents or other relatives), and describes how they experience the post-Soviet housing order as 'arbitrary and unfair.'

The strength of this book is in the rich detail of the chapters, with most chapters confidently examining change over time as well as documenting the contemporary situation of young people's housing. It is striking how economic change over time (both recession as well as economic and social restructuring), has had a major impact on young people's housing chances across such diverse countries. Equally, social and cultural norms have a strong effect on housing preferences and outcomes. The chapters amply demonstrate how 'leaving home' is a long process, rather than a single point in time (Jones, 1995).

The main limitation of the book is that there are no comparative contributions (save, in part, for the short introduction by Forrest). Whilst it is understandable that this is the case, as the work is not underpinned by a major programme of research/workshops¹, it is disappointing for the reader that analysis was not available on the extent to which countries differed, or were similar, in their approaches to housing young people. Failing this, the thematic sections could perhaps have allowed a small number of authors to address a similar set of questions. Forrest concludes that:

‘If there is a general conclusion it is that the interaction between youth and housing has to be understood in its particular cultural and historical context; that apparently similar trends in relation to the transition to adulthood may have different causes and consequences in different cultures; and that what is ‘normal’ in relation to the pattern of departure from the family home varies temporally and culturally’ (p.14).

A more detailed comparative cross-country analysis would have been able to bring out some of these conclusions more sharply.

It is important to point out to the reader that the book does not explicitly address the needs of marginalised young people in the housing market, nor that of homelessness per se (with the exception of the Swedish chapter). This is both a strength and limitation depending on one’s viewpoint. The book makes a good case of identifying young people as a marginalised group as a whole, and does highlight inequalities within young people. Arguably, however, these points would only have been strengthened if there had been an opportunity to examine the situation of marginalised young people more closely. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the book is a welcome contribution to an important subject area which is likely only to grow in policy importance in the coming years. It will be of interest to both students and academics. It should also be of interest to policy makers who wish to reflect on the impact of housing policies on the position of present and future generations of young people in their societies.

► **Reference**

Jones, G. (1995) *Leaving Home* (London: Open University Press).

Deborah Quilgars

Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, UK

¹ Although it does inform a Hong Kong research project on ‘Housing the Post-eighties generation’.