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Article

The Notion of Housing Need in France: From Norms to Negotiations (19th–21st Century)

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Abstract

This article aims to show how the concept of housing need has circulated between the social sciences and architectural design fields in France since the second half of the 19th century up until today. France is a particularly rich example for developing this sociohistorical overview over a long span of time, through three time periods : the beginning of housing policy which, during the hygienist period and in legal devices and statistics defining "good housing" as opposed to inadequate housing; the debate surrounding the notion of need illustrated through an examination of mass construction since the beginning of the 1950s, in particular that of large social housing estates which developed in response to the housing crisis and the increase of slums; the contemporary period that raises many questions faced by architects and urban planners concerning the persistence of forms of inadequate housing and the development of individual aspirations for well-being.

Keywords

housing, norms, social science, architecture, needs

Issue

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The notion of housing need is the focus of a significant amount of literature in numerous countries (Balchin, 1981). It intersects demographic growth — in particular the evolution of number of households— with housing construction (Ytrehus, 2000), very often finding itself with inadequacies; which are expressed in terms of household type (i.e. family, single person, young people, workers, elderly), housing type (depending on size or status, such as social or public housing, private rental sector, home ownership, etc.) and location (i.e. tension zones in the property market). This type of statistic is intended to guide the strategies of governments confronted with the "housing crisis" at different levels (Kleinman, 1995; Schwartz, 2011, Heslop and Ormerod, 2020). However, while it does make it possible to highlight inequalities, it struggles to identify latent needs that are not expressed explicitly (such as young adults as they move out of their parents' home), and that tend to diversify alongside changes in contemporary lifestyle (for example, single-parent families, reconstituted families, or couples who live apart) (Baron-Pollak, 1994). Furthermore, this type of statistic can also be critiqued for its narrow understanding of what is considered housing, as a diversity of forms continue to emerge in this domain, such as co-living, cohousing, tiny homes, temporary or timeshare occupancy statuses, as well as more marginal forms, whether desired or imposed, such as year-round camping, or ecological yurts (which are not taken into account by statistics) (O'Dell, Smith and White, 2004).

The problem of scarcity, speculation, and housing inadequacy has given rise to mass protests throughout the world: in France (2007), Israel (2011), Spain (2012), Great Britain (2016), Argentina (2018), Chile (2020). According to the United Nations, in 2020 the homeless represented 800 million people worldwide, slum-dwellers in developed countries corresponding to a similar figure (862 million). This reflects the brutal

50 inadequacy of housing (Sassen, 2014) as well as eviction mechanisms. While the right to adequate housing is
51 stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, statistics that measure housing issues — such
52 as overcrowding, lack of facilities (like missing bath or toilet), a leaking roof inside the house or insufficient
53 natural light — showed that, in 2009, 5.5% of vulnerable households were located in the EU (Turkington and
54 Watson, 2014). These indicators demonstrate the difficulties faced by national housing systems in responding
55 to a demand that is not only statistical, but that also reflects the lifestyles of diverse populations
56

57 Considerations of quantitative housing need, however, have not always been disconnected from qualitative
58 and architectural dimensions. This article aims to show how the concept of "housing need" has circulated
59 between the social sciences and architectural design fields in France since the second half of the 19th century
60 up until today. The notion of circulation makes it possible to understand processes of interpretation and
61 commonality between the different fields of thought (Fijalkow, 2019) but also to better grasp the normative
62 narratives of experts.
63

64 France is a particularly rich example for developing this sociohistorical overview over a long span of time,
65 through three time periods. It allows us to first identify the beginning of housing policy which, during the
66 hygienist period, can be seen in the public interventions of Baron Haussmann (1852-1870), and in legal devices
67 and statistics defining "good housing" as opposed to inadequate housing. Second, the debate surrounding the
68 notion of need is illustrated through an examination of mass construction since the beginning of the 1950s, in
69 particular that of large social housing estates which developed in response to the housing crisis and the
70 increase of slums (Cupers, 2014). Finally, the contemporary period raises many questions faced by architects
71 and urban planners concerning the persistence of forms of inadequate housing and the development of
72 individual aspirations for well-being.
73

74 **Comfort and the notion of need : theoretical aspects**

75

76 Our approach to housing need integrates Foucault's (1977) theory on governability of the self and the power of
77 panopticon within housing, insofar as comfort facilities establish domestic practices (i.e. sanitary facilities in the
78 19th century, or home automation in the 21st century). Nevertheless, we distance ourselves from an
79 intentionalist perspective, considering comfort in housing as an interdisciplinary and professional field
80 according to Bourdieu theory (Cohen, 2011) that is the subject of negotiations, interpretations and
81 reconstructions (Barthe, Callon and Lascoumes, 2014). Expressed through norms, comfort thus reveals power
82 relations between actors (such as the state, landlords, or professional organizations), while also expressing the
83 practices of inhabitants with memories of norms, but who depend on facilities imposed by policy direction.
84

85 Indeed, the notion of norm with respect to housing is represented at several levels. On the one hand, there are
86 construction requirements, such as room size and sanitary facilities; and on the other are social behavioral
87 requirements, such as hygiene rules. Norms are thus imposed both on builders, who must respect a certain
88 quality in order to enter the market, and on residents, in order to gain access to housing and not get evicted.
89 Moreover, if certain norms primarily aim to make housing tradeable on the market, they are also affected by
90 the social practices that distinguish different types of housing. Indeed, the housing standardization process,
91 which is based on the installation of basic utilities (i.e. sanitation, ventilation, lighting, heating, etc.), inevitably
92 confronts the practices of inhabitants.
93

94 Norms and standards were therefore at the heart of state implemented housing policy when it appeared in the
95 19th century, as part of the fight against housing inadequacy and the construction of social housing. Today, this
96 policy works as a field structured by actors, opinions and rules of action in which the state still plays an
97 important, if not dominant, role. In France, "good housing" is defined by the Civil Code as well as the Housing
98 and Urban Planning Code (in the name of public health and for the preservation of the planet). More recently,
99 however, it has come to be defined by private actors through "certifications" which certify housing quality in
100 terms of energy consumption. These certifications are a guarantee of quality and contribute to the value of
101 buildings (Fijalkow, 2018). Like Bourdieu, we can thus speak of a normative field of housing which involves
102 architects, developers, landlords, local authorities and associations (Mac Kee, 2011), all of which claim to have
103 the skills to define what is "good housing". Within this framework, there are conflicts of legitimacy between
104 actors, negotiations between those in a dominant position and an integration of social issues when they threat
105 the social equilibrium. In recent years, this has even further complexified with the arrival of private actors and
106 environmental construction norms, which address both construction quality and household energy practices.

107 Like in other European countries, France is witnessing a decentralization of norms, impacting both local
108 authorities and private actors (Bevir et al, 2003).

109
110 The notion of comfort has simultaneously evolved on an individual scale. According to historian Crowley (2001),
111 the notion of comfort, introduced in the 19th century in Great Britain and the United States, encompasses a
112 technical definition: "self-conscious satisfaction with the relationship between one's body and its immediate
113 physical environment." As demonstrated by Miller (1983), suburbanization in the United States throughout the
114 20th century has rendered comfort increasingly technological, integrating utilities (i.e. sanitary, household
115 appliances, recreational) and systems (i.e. running water, heating, ventilation, home automation) that involve
116 energy expenditure. Le Goff (1994) shows that, in France, the ideas of economic development and comfort are
117 interconnected in such a way that comfort is considered a legitimate result of progress and a way of displaying
118 social status. In France, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies began classifying elements of
119 comfort in the 1946 census, taking into account whether housing consisted of a kitchen, utilities, a lavatory,
120 electricity, gas network connection, water network connection, and sewer connection.

121
122 Comfort can therefore be seen as a set of technical, social and cultural mediations constructed as social norms
123 according to the collective representation of an era. This is highlighted in the work of Shove (2003), who
124 proposes to analyze the dynamics that lead to the search for comfort and what defines it, rather than
125 supposedly objective factors. Her generational and cultural analysis highlights differentiated relationships to
126 technical tools, consumption, social distinction and well-being. Furthermore, she remains attentive to various
127 cultures and histories of housing, demonstrating homogenizing factors.

128
129

130 **Hygienic needs: a bedroom policy and the architects**

131

132 During the 19th century, housing became a political question and coincided with the search for norm-setting
133 mechanisms. At the time, Engels' famous book (1845) and essay on the question of housing (1887) were part
134 of the dominant line of thought in literature, politics, philosophy and economics, and were heavily influenced
135 by the epidemics that affected European countries. Public health thus brought together doctors, politicians and
136 demographers.

137

138 In France, the Law on Inadequate Housing of 1850 targeted rental apartments that were "liable to threaten the
139 life or health of inhabitants". Municipalities wishing to apply the law (which is optional) may appoint a special
140 commission made up of a doctor, an architect and a member of the health and human services office. The
141 commission is tasked with going on site and mediating between the landlord, the town hall and the tenant or
142 neighbor who filed the complaint. It also has the power to enforce construction work or expropriate (Fijalkow,
143 2000)

144

145 Baron Haussmann, for example, used the law on unfit housing to strengthen his initiatives in working class
146 neighborhoods. However, his actions mainly catalyzed the decree-law of 1852 on the streets of Paris, which
147 was much more authoritarian. While his transformation of Paris raised the "average standing" of the city and
148 made it attractive for the bourgeoisie, no improvements were seen in the housing conditions of the poor.
149 Walter Benjamin (1989) denounced Haussmann's extravagant urban planning, which left many slum-dwellers
150 in the shadow of great "advancements" (large, straight boulevards lined with trees and apartment buildings
151 made of stone). After the Paris Commune, the Inadequate Housing Commission hardened its doctrine, thanks
152 to engineers who managed the municipal water authority as of 1869.

153

154 The consistency of insalubrity diagnoses still raised questions, however, and a universal definition of poor
155 housing seemed necessary in order to rationalize public action. Du Mesnil, faithful successor to Villermé, wrote
156 numerous articles on housing conditions for the *Annales d'hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, the journal
157 that piloted the hygiene movement after the cholera outbreak of 1832. After a long period of debate, the City
158 of Paris created a permanent office to organize its statistics in 1881, appointing Jacques Bertillon, doctor and
159 demographer.

160

161 In 1891, Bertillon published the first housing conditions census and mapped the overcrowding of housing. He
162 claimed to be measuring "poor housing", although he was primarily quantifying "household congestion".
163 Nevertheless, for the first time, a statistical evaluation of housing was conducted. Bertillon measured

164 overcrowding in terms of "people per room". "Rooms" were considered spaces in which a bed could be placed,
165 with a minimum dimension of 2 by 1.5 meters. Census surveyors asked households to indicate the number of
166 "rooms" with a fireplace, as well as if the apartment contained a toilet. The results revealed that 23% of
167 households lived in overcrowded housing, and the overcrowding map clearly outlined the working-class
168 neighborhoods in the north-east of Paris. For "moral statistics", overcrowding thus reflected demographic
169 behavior (Fijalkow, 2000). After the Paris Commune of 1871, the "moral order" dominant in politics, religion
170 and society sought to implement a plan to reduce overcrowding and to increase the birth rate through the
171 construction of social housing in each arrondissement of Paris (Hanson, 2010).

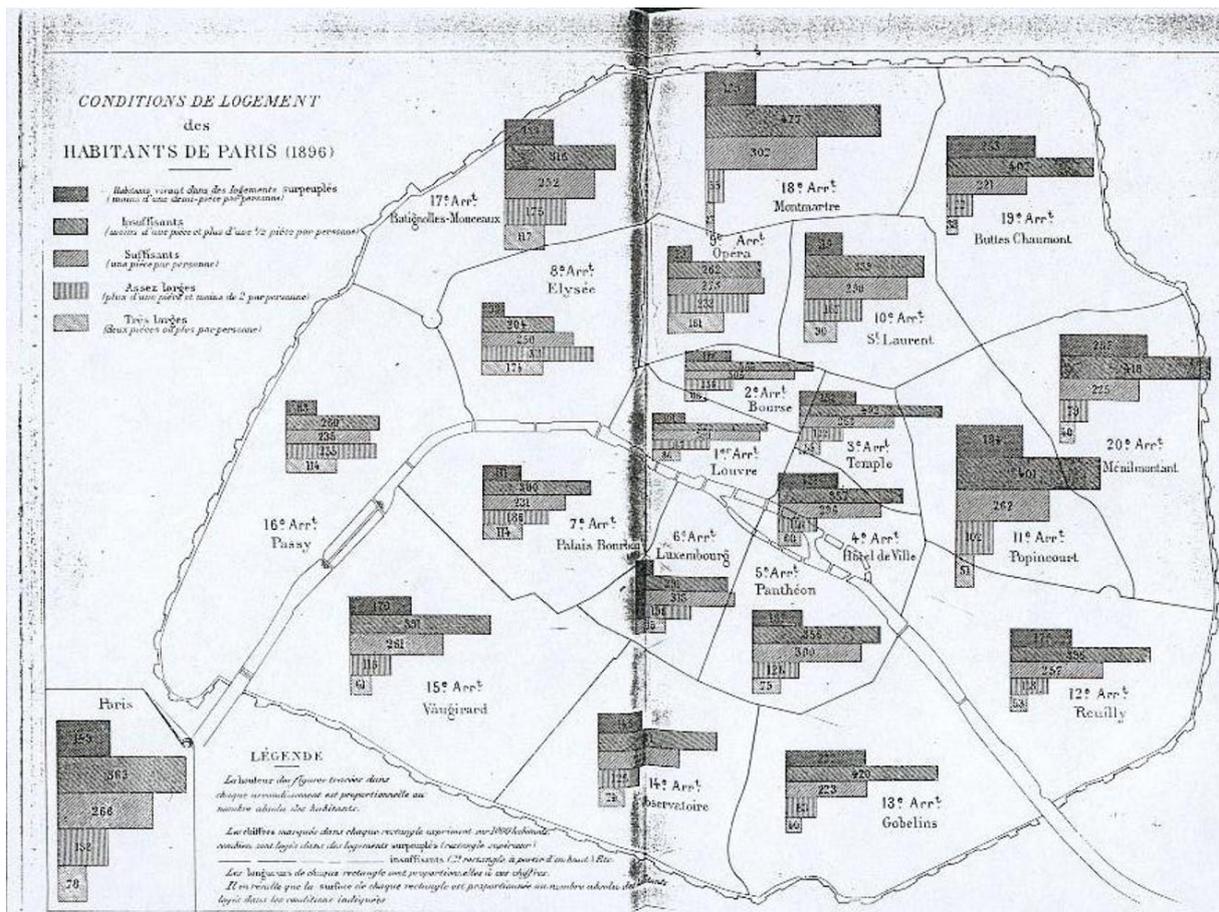
172
173 How does this translate in terms of architecture? To understand the "needs" expressed by the statistics of
174 Jacques Bertillon, it is necessary to explain what qualifies as "good housing" in the post-Haussmannian context.
175 This period lauded an apartment inspired by the aristocratic hotel. In Haussmannian apartments, we generally
176 find a beautiful entryway with a hallway granting access to each room. Facing the street are three adjoining
177 reception rooms, made up of a living room, a dining room or a bedroom. These rooms received fine
178 architectural attention, and were adorned with fireplaces, marquetry floors and moldings. At the time, the
179 courtyard side of the apartment was reserved for the kitchen and the servants. The partitioning of reception
180 rooms, private rooms, as well as bedrooms and their sanitary facilities is a basic principle found in
181 Haussmannian apartments (Eleb, 2021).

182
183 Thus, when Bertillon deplored that "in too many Parisian dwellings, working-class families live together,
184 parents and children alike, in the same room," (Bertillon, 1894, p.9) he referred to the architectural principles of
185 Haussmannian housing divided by "room", "heated", intended for the "conventional, large family" and
186 designed by architects trained at the Fine art school (Ecole des Beaux Arts). This design was opposed to the
187 working-class way of living together in the same room in buildings built by owners.

188
189 In the second half of the 19th century, the first social housing projects were inspired by Haussmannian
190 principles. In 1849, the Cité Napoléon program (architect Veugny) included separate rooms and water access
191 on each floor. The housing estate was comprised of collective facilities, like a wash house, a bath house and a
192 children's shelter, while also preserving the autonomy and privacy of families (Bruant, 2011).

193
194 Architects were invited to participate in competitions organized by social housing organizations. Some of
195 them, who had read Bertillon's works, gave a broader understanding to the notion of "hygienic architecture",
196 citing Alberti's writings (Daly, 1878). Emile Trélat (1821-1907) introduced a "hygiene course" at the Ecole
197 Centrale d'Architecture, within which he explained the concepts of physiology and environment. Hygiene,
198 however, remained less present at the Beaux-Arts de Paris. Louis Bonnier (1856-1946) appeared as an
199 exception, building low-cost housing (*Habitat bon marché*, HBM) in the Seine region, and contributing to
200 reports on the "tuberculous blocks of Paris" alongside Paul Juillerat. He suggested that social housing
201 architecture consisted of "sincerely adapting to successive needs." Augustin Rey (1864-1934), however, built
202 the first HBM for the Rothschild Foundation, giving way to ideas on ventilation and natural lighting which were
203 later applied in Le Corbusier's Radiant City in 1935 (Rey, 1927).

204



Housing conditions established by Bertillon statistics (1896)

The normative notion of "needs" during the post-war reconstruction and social housing projects

After World War II, the post-war reconstruction revealed a housing shortage, due to both collateral damage and construction delays that began at the start of the century. The housing crisis could be seen in the shortage of available housing, along with their poor and deteriorating conditions. This gave way to intense public debate, as well as social movements calling for government intervention (Castells and al. 1978).

In 1946, Duon and Lenain published a survey study on housing conditions in Paris for the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, which found that a third of housing had outdoor toilets and just 20% had running water. "Need" thus translated in terms of utilities, especially those related to heating and hygiene. The Ministry of Reconstruction also asked private teams to study certain areas of degraded housing by focusing on household behavior. The Economy and Humanism Team thus inspected each apartment, in order to identify characteristics of the housing. Heads of households were asked to answer a survey which aimed to measure the "sociability" of inhabitants (whether they had a regular job, how the household was managed, furniture quality, lifestyle) and the "adequacy" of housing (i.e. ventilation, natural light, water supply). This made it possible to distinguish between types of families (i.e. "normal", "re-educable", etc.) as well as types of housing (i.e. inadequate, overcrowded, unhygienic, etc.) (Auzelle, 1949)

With this type of survey, understandings of the notion of need go beyond that of technical equipment, taking into account the education of families by categorizing those who should be supported and referred to transitional housing. This type of reasoning was in line with pre-war socialist thinking on the question of "normal housing". In 1943, Henri Sellier (1883-1943), one of the pioneers of social housing, was reflecting upon post-war housing and stated in an article entitled "The Definition of Normal Housing" that its technical factors must take into account human habit. Need as a concept thus required "adaptable" housing, a reflection which ushered the contribution of the social sciences.

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235 In 1953, the government finally adopted strong measures to finance and organize construction, and a process
236 of social housing stock hierarchization was therefore put in place.

237
238 In social housing — known as "HLM" (*habitation à loyer modéré*) since 1950 — distinctions developed between
239 populations corresponding to different needs. Construction norms thus allowed for the HLM to be hierarchized
240 by social standing. A distinction was created between HLM "A" and HLM "B", which was based on whether the
241 kitchen was designed to be used for meals. If so, it was considered HLM "A", and the size of the kitchen
242 increased to the detriment of the living room, and vice versa for HLM "B", in which the living room was
243 prioritized. Housing managers justified this distinction with a more "rural" and "working class" version, and it
244 was adopted by many architects of the post-war reconstruction period (Dubuisson, Prouvé, Lods). In 1957,
245 architect Jean Prouvé (1901-1984) developed a project along the same lines, but which was aimed at the
246 poorest populations. It consisted of a minimalist, less expensive housing development that was well equipped
247 with heating and hygiene facilities. Here, we can thus observe the appearance of social hierarchy processes and
248 a search for standardization.

249
250 To this end, a convergence of views between demographers and modern architects can be seen, who were
251 attentive to the functioning of rooms and occupancy norms.

252
253 In 1946, the scientific journal *Population*, published by the French Institute for Demographic Studies, examined
254 this pertinent question. Demographer Alfred Sauvy promoted housing policy as a vehicle for birth rate policy,
255 asserting that "the aging of our heritage, a consequence of human aging, is an important and essential cause
256 for our current impoverishment." (Sauvy, 1946, p 441) In the same publication, the renowned architect Le
257 Corbusier proposed a functionalist action program based on his "modulor" model, in which he expressed:

258 What is the key element of the apartment? The bedroom. We are all familiar with this
259 room: square shaped with a bed at its center, a lightbulb hanging from the ceiling... it's
260 the quintessence of inhospitable. Each member of the family, children and parents alike,
261 must be able to have their own private haven, where they can be "left alone", where
262 they can have their own work space, where there is enough room for physical activity.
263 (Le Corbusier, 1948, p 420)

264
265 Le Corbusier's understanding of "needs" led to a normative understanding of housing practices.

266
267 This convergence, around the notion of need and in favor of a normalized and hierarchized architecture based
268 on lifestyle, was accepted by the sociologist Paul Henry Chombart de Lauwe. In his research, the concept of
269 overcrowding remained central in the evaluation of needs. As the first French urban sociologist in the post-war
270 period, Chombart de Lauwe established an index based on the number of people per room as well as the
271 surface area. This index allows us to:

272 "determine thresholds below which physical diseases and behavioral disorders are likely
273 to appear (...) below a certain surface area, family life becomes more and more difficult
274 to bear. The woman, harassed by her children and exhausted by laundry, quickly burns
275 out in a house that she cannot even arrange to her liking or keep clean." (Chombart de
276 Lauwe, 1956, p 80)

277
278 According to the author, this threshold is situated between 8 and 14 square meters per person. It also
279 supported the journalistic narrative on "Sarcellititis", an illness found in large housing estates that especially
280 impacted the psychology of women and children. It corresponded to the position of sociologists who, like the
281 hygienists of the 19th century, wanted to have a say in architectural projects, which turned out to be a failure
282 with regard to the economic conditions of large housing estate production.

283
284 Hygiene and well-being were concepts that guided his approach to housing needs. This minimalist and
285 functionalist vision of responding to needs was widely shared at the time. It fell in line with the considerations
286 of Doctor Goromosov (1968) of the World Health Organization on physiological needs and the microclimate of
287 housing.

288
289 At the end of the 1960s, however, a sociological alternative emerged when Henri Lefebvre (1968) revealed the
290 working class need for a "right to the city" and an appropriation of space, in the face of "de-urbanizing
291 urbanization". Criticism of large housing estates thus took on another dimension, simultaneously combining

292 social, symbolic and architectural factors. In response, Chombart de Lauwe tried to distinguish between
293 "needs" and "aspirations", referencing the work of Maslow (1948) who placed self-esteem at the very top of
294 the pyramid of needs. Indeed, if "needs" refer to physiological factors, "aspirations" express the attachment of
295 a social group to their space. This also conforms to the principles of social morphology analysis established by
296 Maurice Halbwachs and Marcel Mauss, founders of housing sociology. Halbwachs considered that "the material
297 forms of society act upon it, not by virtue of a physical constraint, as a body would act, on another body, but by
298 consciousness that we take of it..." (Halbwachs 1938 p 182-83).

299
300 Based on this theoretical view, Chombart de Lauwe agreed with the point of view of public authorities
301 regarding the "needs" of populations in terms of technical equipment, while also considering lifestyles and the
302 emerging trend that questioned the appropriation of urban spaces, revealing himself to be quite critical
303 towards modern urban planners and architects.

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306
307 **Sarcelles, an emblematic case**

308
309
310 **Current period (since 1990): the search for essential features and “quality” in architecture**

311
312 Since the 1990s, the notion of need has covered several dimensions, linking social science research and public
313 action.

314
315 The first is poor housing and residential vulnerability, which reappeared in 1995. According to the Abbé Pierre
316 Foundation, which relies on official data from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, there
317 are nearly 4 million people in France living with housing difficulties (Abbé Pierre Foundation report 2021). This
318 includes the homeless, those living in camps, households in situations of overcrowding and those with energy
319 insecurity. There also exist less extremes situations of "residential vulnerability", which stem from property
320 value, lack of residential flow, social tension between landlords and tenants, and distance to work location.
321 The conclusion shared by political institutions, housing actors and civic action spheres is a quantitative increase
322 in housing construction. This, however, only allows for the needs of new households arriving each year on the
323 housing market to be met. The existing housing stock, a third of which was built before World War II and which
324 houses young, immigrant and disadvantaged households (Levy and Fijalkow, 2010), would also need to be
325 renovated, which would involve significant financial efforts from public institutions. Public policy tools to fight
326 against inadequate housing buildings are being developed, although they remain insufficient. Tenants can also
327 report indecent housing conditions to a judge. However, some landlord unions, and even those who build

328 public housing for home ownership, are in support of a minimalist trend in terms of housing norms. To make
329 the market more flexible and to reduce their costs, they oppose construction norms that are too numerous and
330 that pose too many constraints (Fijalkow, 2015). Although inordinate, their positions lead to a reflection on the
331 essential features of housing. For this reason, recent decrees requiring builders to adapt housing to be
332 handicap accessible were made more flexible.

333
334 The second type of need involves considering the desires of inhabitants through participatory devices that give
335 voice to users. This method, in accordance with Henri Lefebvre's proposals, more often concerns the
336 surrounding environment than the interior of housing, except in certain cases of collective production. It is
337 more often applied in social housing districts targeted by public policies (Cupers, 2011). In the context of
338 pauperization the consideration of needs includes the demand for security and public spaces, but also the
339 difficulties resulting from divisive processes and a lack of residential opportunities, in particular for young
340 working people and marginalized populations, and recently little towns. Criticism of housing standards,
341 however, also leads to the increasingly widespread practice of collaborative architecture in housing
342 associations. This can lead to the collectivization of services that were previously integrated into housing.

343
344 The third type of need relates to sustainable housing and the control of energy expenditure. In this context, a
345 recent decree has led us to consider heating difficulties in certain poorly insulated apartments as a
346 characteristic of inadequacy and poor housing that affects underprivileged populations. Among other
347 demands, the Gilets Jaunes movement that erupted in the fall of 2019 also underlined the difficulties of the low
348 middle class living far from their place of work, and support considerable energy expenditure for travel. For
349 them the concept of need, or aspiration, expresses a need for integration and environmental control.

350
351 Faced with these forms of housing needs, the architectural responses turned out to be negotiated responses
352 (Eleb and Simon, 2014) depending on the recipient: public housing, social housing, private housing, or low-cost
353 home ownership. They could address housing surface area, in order to counter its declining trend over the last
354 twenty years, according to a recent report Lemas (official report for the Ministry, 2021). The idea of "an
355 additional space", necessary for storing belongings, extending functional rooms or receiving guests, is intended
356 to be a response to various needs. This concern is linked to the need for more storage space, unlike changes
357 dictated by the optimization of resource use. This issue coincided with the demand for greater flexibility in
358 housing depending on the family structure: conventional, single-parent, step-parent, or the presence of young
359 adults and the elderly.

360
361 A good architectural example is the renovation of the Bois-le-Prêtre Tower in Paris, which extended each
362 apartment to include a "winter garden". The search for additional space was fundamental to the rehabilitation
363 of this building built in the early 1960s. It consisted of adding a 3-meter-wide extension to the apartments
364 through a self-supporting structure surrounding the perimeter of the tower, comprised of a two-meter-wide
365 winter garden and a one-meter balcony. In addition, this project opened up dialogue with the inhabitants, who
366 constituted the competition jury in 2005. Residents were first presented a show apartment, which was
367 followed by a resident vote, which resulted in favor of the rehabilitation project. The architects Frédéric Drout,
368 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal then began implementing the renovation. Tenants were able to
369 participate in the process through workshops.

370
371 The quality of outdoor public space and services is also illustrative of the architectural objectives which set out
372 to meet the needs mentioned above. In this regard, the Parisian project known as Diapason is also exemplary.
373 Vegetation is omnipresent in the community garden on the ground floor, in shared green terraces, on private
374 balconies with plants, as well as in vegetable gardens. Energy performance even exceeds regulatory
375 requirements. The set-up of the operation consisted of a particular construction method: individual private
376 buyers came together in a cooperative (Diapason group) to create their own housing project, as part of a
377 development initiative for the City of Paris. The project mainly focused on the sharing of spaces and facilities :
378 14 apartments share a vegetable garden, common storage areas, a laundry room, a shared studio for guests, a
379 bicycle storage room, and a workshop. This architectural interpretation reveals that the notion of comfort, and
380 therefore of need, falls within a dimension that is both emotional and moral in terms of household. Not only
381 were everyone's desires taken into account, but it was also important that the place of residence be the
382 outcome of a chosen community's expression, and that it carry the ethical values of solidarity and ecology.

383

384 This discourse responds well to the reflections of certain essayists, architects and sociologists on the essential
385 qualities of housing seen from the point of view of the individual. For Mona Chollet (2015), the search for
386 "home" is a fundamental value that opposes mechanisms of the phenomenon of living space reduction that
387 she refers to as the "great eviction". Winifred Gallagher (2005) provides an American example of this theory in
388 his book, *House Thinking*, which aims to show how the arrangement of each room in the American home
389 reflects the person who lives in it, and also conditions their behavior. Irene Sartoretti (2016), however, raises
390 the question of industrial apartment furniture production, which homogenizes and universalizes living
391 conditions. These reflections show that housing is at the center of conflicting values, divided between taking
392 into account the needs of individuals, along with ecology and material comfort. In terms of heating materials,
393 for example, the range of values, which are increasingly sensitive to eco-citizenship, puts in tension the
394 aspiration for "civic frugality" (and therefore ecological) and the hedonism of comfort that enlarge the sense of
395 the 'needs'. In a recent survey, we showed that, while many homeowners do not seem ready to sacrifice for
396 efficient heating and while others seek to regulate their habits with the help of technology, all of them allude
397 to the search for well-being and comfort (Fijalkow and Maresca, 2018).

398 399 **Conclusions**

400
401 The history of the notion of need allows us to identify the narratives and values on which housing policies and
402 their architecture are based. This historical overview attests to the succession of norms carried out by different
403 actors with different objectives, as well as the processes of interpretation from one professional field to
404 another. During the hygienic period, the concept of overcrowding dominated the debate on the definition of
405 good housing and allowed architects to emphasize the importance of rooms. During the modern period, the
406 notion of need enabled the emergence of technical standards and the hierarchy of forms of housing that were
407 justified by the search for adaptation. Today, contrary to the discourse put forth by Heidegger in 1951, the
408 ethics of inhabiting does not reside in its isolation, as philosophers once thought, but in its capacity for
409 individuality and hospitality, as contemporary experiments have shown (Sennet, 2020). In this respect, social
410 housing organisations, which played a central role as a meeting place between social sciences and architecture
411 in the first two periods, are less present today. This has the effect of being more attentive to the inhabitants, of
412 developing new procedures for negotiating standards between the actors, but of dispersing the reflection on
413 the quality of housing.

414
415 Our exploration of the question of need shows that three trends are exercised today in the field of housing:
416 standardization, hierarchization and the search for alternatives. In a context of hybridization of forms of
417 housing production, both private and state led, and of lifestyle and demographic reconstruction, we are
418 witnessing a dynamic of archipelization; that is, a diversification of needs. This results in the multiplication of
419 systems of norms, values and sub-markets. In this sense, France offers a particular trajectory of the evolution
420 of the notion of need, illustrated by a strong assumption of responsibility for housing by the public authorities
421 in the twentieth century. The progressive privatization requires comparisons with other countries, particularly
422 after the Covid pandemic¹⁹, which forced the State to intervene in social and economic life and to rethink the
423 notion of housing quality.

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427 **Conflict of Interests**

428 The author declares no conflict of interests.

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