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Housing motivated youth in low-income neighborhoods: how practitioners shape conditions for encounters across diversity in ‘intentional’ social mix programs in Milan and Paris

Abstract

The concept of social mix has been thoroughly examined in the housing literature. Research to date finds little evidence of encounters between socially diverse residents living in mixed settings. This paper provides comparative insights into new, socially mixed housing initiatives in Milan and Paris that have been conceived to promote encounters among diverse residents. Both initiatives, implemented by not-for-profit organizations, provide affordable housing for university students or young professionals in low-income social housing neighborhoods in exchange for their commitment to organize solidarity activities with and for their social housing neighbors. The paper examines how frameworks provided by housing practitioners for ‘intentional’ encounters between motivated youth and low-income residents shape these encounters and considers the receptivity of the youth population to intentionally engage in common projects across diversity. It distills some core conditions within these programs that promote encounters among diverse residents.

Keywords: social mix; role model; culture of poverty; affordable housing; encounters; social housing management

Introduction

The idea that residential segregation erodes equality of opportunities and social mobility is at the basis of urban policies that promote social mix. Residential social mix has typically been pursued by increasing the share of private housing for middle income groups in areas with a high concentration of social housing and low-income groups (Kleinhans, 2004).

Many presumed benefits of social mix policies, such as increasing social capital, social networks, and cohesion, depend upon encounters taking place between residents from different tenures and social backgrounds, i.e. middle and low incomes (Bolt & Van Kempen, 2013). Researchers have also given attention to the potential for such encounters to reduce prejudice (Valentine, 2008; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011). While contested in the literature, the presumption that the lives of low-income residents can be improved by bringing in middle class residents to role model values, norms and behaviors for emulation continues to shape policy makers' discourse in justifying social mix as a desegregation measure. In addition to problematizing such claims, many researchers conclude that it is too simplistic to expect that social mix will automatically produce encounters and find that other factors, such as good planning and focused community development, come into play (Bolt & van Kempen, 2013; Camina & Wood, 2009; Tunstall & Fenton, 2006). Indeed, a number of scholars call for further empirical enquiry into the conditions under which encounters across diversity occur (Valentine, 2008; Wilson & Darling, 2016; Wise, 2009). Discussions around poverty concentration and deconcentration measures, as addressed in this paper, are even more pertinent in times of increasing segregation along socio-economic lines (Tamaru, Van Ham, Marcińczak, & Musterd, 2016). Of particular note—although poorly examined in the literature—is the role of housing organizations and other actors on the front line with residents, facilitating and supporting encounters within mixed residential settings (Camina & Wood, 2009; Chaskin & Joseph 2011; Chaskin, Sichling, & Joseph, 2013; Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013).

In recent framings of social mix in the social housing sphere in Italy and the Netherlands, housing practitioners create specific frameworks to promote habitual encounters “between people who would not otherwise meet” (Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013, p. 418). The aim of these encounters is to counteract social exclusion and social isolation, arising, for example, from a lack of relationships (Van Eijk, 2010). They take the form of common projects and regular, shared social activities among residents (Costarelli, Kleinhans, & Mugnano, 2019). As the site of such activities, the housing sphere can be included among what Amin (2012) denotes as a ‘micro-public,’ with the potential to produce new patterns of social interaction across diversity. Central to this framework is the creation and targeting of a specific category, ‘motivated youth’. These ‘motivated youth’ are willing to live side-by-side and proactively interact with their neighbors, who tend to be made up of specific populations such as the elderly, low-income tenants, refugees, or people experiencing homelessness.

The centering of motivation aims to sidestep barriers stemming from newcomer residents' unwillingness or indifference toward interacting with longstanding residents, which has proven to be a shortcoming of mainstream social mix policies (Bacqué, Charmes, & Vermeersch, 2014; Rose, Germain, Bacqué, Bridge, Fijalkow, & Slater, 2013). Therefore, bringing in new residents based on their willingness—or intention—to engage with longstanding residents qualifies these experiences as ‘intentional’ social mix.

Whether or not practitioners' expectations of this new target group depart from or simply reproduce assumptions about role modelling rooted in culture of poverty theories (Lewis, 1966) merits consideration.

In assessing the effectiveness of social mix policy, Bolt and van Kempen (2013) conclude that “what works in one place does not necessarily work in another place,” (p. 3) suggesting the relevance of contextual factors and contingencies at both the program- and ground- level. In this regard, we consider the contextual conditions shaping encounters across diversity within a new framework of

‘intentional’ social mix targeting motivated youth, in two case studies in Paris (France) and Milan (Italy). While the core mechanics of both programs are similar, several foundational differences underpin each case: their rationale, institutional settings, assumptions about youth and social housing tenants, the purpose and nature of intended encounters, and the envisaged role of housing practitioners in supporting this. We explore the implications of these differences in order to shed light on conditions that are conducive to encounters across diversity in mixed housing.

This paper discusses and compares housing practitioners’ expectations of intentional social mix, the actions they take to fulfil these expectations, and the conditions shaping encounters across diversity based on an exploration of realities on the ground. The cases frame the benefits of these encounters in different ways. The French case seeks to go beyond the unidirectional role model theory, emphasizing instead an encounter that is mutually enriching—or *reciprocal*. The Italian case does tend to depict the youth as role models, but as models of resourcefulness rather than middle-class values and norms. In both cases, the newly created category of ‘motivated youth’ are expected, through their civic engagement, to encourage residents to initiate collective actions and engage in civic participation, while also strengthening togetherness, social ties, and solidarity across diversity in their neighborhoods.

Finally, while at the level of program-design, the philosophies guiding the management of youth engagement differ (accompaniment in Paris in contrast to accountability and performance assessment in Milan), these approaches become somewhat blurred on the ground, where in both cases youth are situated, to some degree, as extensions of the state and not-for-profit actors in the housing and urban policy sector. This suggests that at the operational level, institutions shape young people’s encounters across diversity in complex ways, neither completely top-down nor fully bottom up, but rather bottom-linked.

We begin by outlining the theoretical foundations of social mix and introducing the concept of ‘intentional’ social mix as a new framing for encounters across diversity, while also probing and problematizing some of the assumptions that underpin traditional approaches to social mix and the categories adopted by policymakers in this regard (sections one and two). Section three details the comparative framework employed in the paper before the two case studies are outlined in section four. Section five describes our approach to data collection and analysis. Section six presents and analyses the paper’s findings along the three axes of what housing practitioners expect, what they do, and how this translates into reality. Finally, we draw some conclusions in section seven.

The theoretical roots of social mix

One of the most pervasive theories underpinning social mix policies is that middle class residents serve as role models to their poorer neighbors (Arthurson, 2012; August, 2019; Blokland, 2003). To a large degree, these assumptions have their roots in the culture of poverty and underclass theories that emerged in the 1960s in the context of poor, largely black American inner cities (Lewis, 1966). The culture of poverty thesis purported that the spatial concentration of poor, non-white populations had given rise to a distinctive way of life, characterized by norms and behaviors considered pathological and deviant in comparison to those of mainstream society (Arthurson, 2012; August, 2019; Blokland, 2003; Katz, 1993; Valentine, 1968). Wilson (1987) shifted the responsibility to the neighborhood as a space that structures and influences life opportunities, though acknowledged the

role of structural changes (e.g. deindustrialization, racial segregation, middle-class outmigration) as the underlying cause of these effects. Though culture of poverty theories were heavily disputed even in those times (see Leacock, 1968; Valentine, 1968), and are still contested in all areas of social policy analysis, such ideas continue to shape the way poverty is framed and dealt with at the policy level, including in current social mix debates about the perceived benefits of middle-class role models for the poor (Arthurson, 2012). A core critique is that such assumptions effectively place the blame for poverty on individual behavior and the perceived moral failings of the poor (Arthurson, 2012; August, 2019; Blokland, 2003). The scope of policy intervention is thereby reduced to managing the behavior of people, and to the neighborhood or territory, often at the expense of treating the complex, structural root causes of poverty (Blokland, 2003).

Furthermore, expecting the middle class “to be forces of uplift and social good” (Lees, 2008, p. 2464) and placing their norms as the standard against which the lives of the poor are judged perpetuates deeply prejudiced conceptions of poor populations that reinforce antagonism and estrangement, and fuel discriminatory policy prescriptions (August, 2019; Katz, 1993; Valentine, 1968). In the European context, Blokland (2003) attributes the prevalence of social mix as a means to reduce the concentration of poverty to the underlying fear that a culture of poverty will emerge from an over-concentration of poor, unemployed, ethnic minorities in urban neighborhoods.

Another assumption of social mix policy that has been problematized is that residents can be clearly divided into binary categories—whether defined in terms of class, income levels, ethnicity, or housing tenure—that neatly correspond to specific lifestyles, values, behaviors, and preferences. Each category is expected to play a preconceived role, or *role inventory*, in the neighborhood. Social mix advocates often expect middle class residents to play a wide role inventory, strengthening community, cohesion, common bonds, togetherness, and solidarity in a given location (Blokland, 2003). However, research has found that the extent to which an individual or a group fulfils such prescribed roles within the neighborhood (neighborhood use) varies significantly according to their life stage and characteristics such as their age, gender, ethnicity, income, and educational level. Furthermore, across all categories, individual behaviors, choices, and initiatives are influenced by institutions. At the neighborhood level, institutions tend to be represented by street-level bureaucrats, but in areas that concentrate social housing, such roles are also assumed by social housing managers. As such, our focus on practitioners is paramount to better understanding a fundamental element of the conditions that promote encounters across diversity within intentional approaches to social mix.

‘Intentional’ social mix as a new framing for encounters across diversity in housing

Research into mainstream approaches to social mix, i.e. diversifying housing tenure within low-income neighborhoods to attract the middle-class, has not supported the assumption that diverse people living next to each other automatically engage in encounters across diversity (Arthurson, Levin, & Ziersch, 2015; Blanc & Bidou-Zachariasen, 2010; Chamboredon & Lemaire, 1970; Chaskin & Joseph, 2011). In this context, a new framing of ‘intentional’ social mix, introduced in reference to affordable housing programs in the Italian and Dutch contexts (Costarelli et al., 2019), emphasizes residents’ motivation—or intention—to encounter their neighbors, rather than merely living side by side.

This framing gives rise to the new policy category, ‘motivated youth’, conceived as vectors of social mix in place of the category of the middle class. Motivated youth who participate in such programs receive accommodation at below-market rates while being willing to contribute their time, energy and creativity to a common project that is anchored in a shared residential space. Examples of projects include shared meals, community gardens, or street parties. These actions, which take on varying levels of formality (e.g. inclusion in the rental agreement), are intended to facilitate encounters with social housing tenants who are predominantly low-income, based on the assumption that such interactions can strengthen solidarity, social ties and promote greater participation of underrepresented groups in civic life. In part, these objectives aim to mitigate the social isolation or exclusion of low-income residents, defined primarily in terms of lacking personal relationships within the estate, as can be the case of solitary elderly people, as well as relationships with more resource rich neighbors beyond the estate (Van Eijk, 2010). These objectives also point towards a vision of the neighborhood as the site where local dynamics, social relations and, to some extent, the use and distribution of resources, can be reshaped. Though, as with most area-based interventions, such approaches do not purport to directly address the deeper underlying structural causes of social inequality.

Within this framework, motivation is understood as that which drives youth to take action for the benefit of their neighborhood. Centering motivation is a way to overcome a key barrier to encounters across diversity in mainstream social mix approaches: newcomer residents’ unwillingness or indifference to interacting with longstanding social tenants—largely because newcomers are not moving into these neighborhoods explicitly for this purpose (Bacqué et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2013). ‘Intentional’ social mix approaches also move away from the premise that the middle class should serve as role models. While some approaches abandon the role modeling ideal all together, in other cases, youth continue to be framed as role models for social housing residents, though now it is their resourcefulness that is being modeled, rather than middle class norms and practices. The idea of resourcefulness refers to having strong relational skills, being supportive, cooperative, and open-minded—virtues that, for policymakers, can be mobilized through youth action (Costarelli, Kleinhans, & Mugnano, 2020). Through the lens of Sen’s (1992) theory of capabilities, resourcefulness can thus be understood as the capability of converting these skills and attitudes into valuable outcomes. In these cases, such outcomes include accessing affordable housing solutions, engaging in encounters across diversity, participating in civic life, and encouraging others to do so. Another aspect of an intentional approach to social mix is the greater involvement of not-for-profit organizations and residents. This is possibly due to the smaller scale of these initiatives, in the form of individual projects and fine-grained social mix in specific cities and neighborhoods. This small-scale approach is a departure from the large-scale framework of state-led urban renewal policies, which have tended to demolish significant chunks of old social housing stock and replace it with mixed tenure developments. This shift raises questions about how the greater involvement of housing practitioners and managers in an intentional approach to social mix adds value through setting expectations, providing a clear framework, and in some cases concrete support for such encounters to occur (Costarelli et al., 2019), which is the focus of this paper. Housing practitioners’ roles in initiating and supporting encounters within mixed residential settings are particularly critical in three types of housing management activities (Priemus, Dieleman, & Clapham, 1999): selection of tenants, i.e. how professionals select suitable, motivated residents; allocation of dwellings, e.g. type of tenancy

agreement, location of dwellings and intended scale of social mix; and stimulating resident participation, i.e. how practitioners support and encourage residents to participate by organizing (or co-organizing) and animating social activities.

Intentional social mix projects that target motivated youth have sprung up in both Milan (Italy) and Paris (France), as will be discussed in the following section.

Comparative framework

In assessing the effectiveness of social mix at the neighborhood level, Bolt and van Kempen (2013) underline the relevance of contextual factors and contingencies at both the micro and macro level. On a macro scale, national and city level contextual factors influence policy approaches, discourses, and the values attached to the idea of social mix (Rose et al., 2013; Veldboer, Kleinhans, & Duyvendak, 2002). This includes differences in planning cultures, in the role of the state and the market in housing and neighborhood development, and in commitment to multicultural policies (Fincher, Iveson, Leitner, & Preston, 2014). On a micro scale, social mix outcomes can be shaped by the quality of the architecture; the state of maintenance of the dwellings and common areas; the presence of physical places within which encounters can occur (Van Eijk, 2010); the spatial configuration of different tenures (Kleinhans, 2004); and opportunities available to residents to organize and manage activities, or to participate in social programs (Tunstall & Fenton, 2006). Most importantly, the success of social mix depends on “the residents themselves, as they are the ones who contribute to neighborhood life through the ways they use the neighborhood and the way they choose to interact (or not) with others” (Bolt & van Kempen, 2013, p. 5).

Since this paper aims to better understand the conditions that shape encounters across diversity within a new framing of intentional social mix, we believe Paris (France) and Milan (Italy) represent two pertinent research sites. In both cities, intentional social mix approaches have emerged despite divergent contextual factors, such as residential segregation dynamics, urban policy agendas, social housing systems, and relations between citizens and institutions. Unlike Italy, France has a tradition of urban policy that explicitly targets socio-spatial poverty through its national City Policy (*politique de la ville*), which has been in place since the early 1980s (Carpenter, González Medina, Huete García, & De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020). Social mix via housing tenure diversification is a central objective of the policy, generally implemented in neighborhoods that concentrate public housing and poverty, through the demolition of older, high-rise social housing buildings and the construction of private dwellings intended to attract middle-class residents (Lelévrier, 2013). The official discourse on social mix aligns, in part, with the French Republican value of territorial equality, whereby area-based policies seek to reduce gaps between regions by reducing the spatial concentration of poverty (Raveaud & Zanten, 2007). Along with the emergence of this national urban policy came the definition of social exclusion and a lack of social ties as central problems to solve in such neighborhoods, paving the way for the kinds of actions that not-for-profit actors, like AFEV, undertake (Tissot, 2008). In Paris, social diversity is virtually synonymous with ethnic diversity (Préteceille, 2009). Thus, while social mix policies explicitly target socio-economic diversity, they also de facto target ethnic diversity and the prevention of ethnic enclaves. The current City Policy, which runs from 2015 to 2022, designates approximately 1500 priority neighborhoods, based on the proportion of residents that fall below a certain income threshold. Priority neighborhoods receive

national and regional funding channeled through city contracts, which include provisions for housing and urban renewal programs (Ministry of Equality, Territory & Housing, 2015).

Unlike the French context, the ideal of social mix, though present, has never been a priority on the Italian urban housing agenda. The most relevant attempts to diversify the tenure and social composition of public housing neighborhoods can be traced back to the national urban renewal policy for disadvantaged neighborhoods (*Contratti di Quartiere*) of the late 1990s-early 2000s. In the framework of this area-based program, social mix via tenure diversification was intended to increase the share of low-middle income groups in public housing neighborhoods. Social animation activities were also implemented to promote social cohesion (Mugnano & Costarelli, 2015). The lack of emphasis on social mix policy in Italy compared to France can be partly explained by diverging realities and framing of urban segregation. The typical suburban landscape of France's largest cities, characterized by tower blocks of social housing estates that concentrate poor, ethnic minorities, is not the case for Italian cities. In Italy, a concentration of poverty exists in limited areas and tends to be scattered across its cities, including within central locations (Mugnano & Costarelli, 2015), making Wilson's (1987) neighborhood effects theory less relevant. Such differences are in turn connected to variations in the share, target, and spatial distribution of social housing. In line with a welfare regime that provides high levels of social protection, France adopts a universalist approach to the provision of social housing, which makes up fourteen percent of the overall housing stock and accommodates various income groups (OECD, 2018). In contrast, a residual approach—targeting only the most vulnerable and accounting for only four percent of the overall housing stock—prevails in the Mediterranean welfare context that characterizes Italy.

There are also differences in institutional frameworks. France has traditionally been a highly centralized state, with a strong sense of stateness that derives from its Republican values. The top-down approach that characterizes France subsequently leaves more room for non-governmental organizations to participate in the execution of policy-driven agendas, but less room for citizen participation to influence decision-making, including in urban policy (Desponds, Auclair, Bergel, & Bertucci, 2014). Many so-called bottom-up initiatives end up falling under the framework of the City Policy. In contrast, Italy is a highly regionalized country and state intervention is highly fragmented, including in urban policy, which leaves more room for bottom up, though often patchy, interventions of other actors, in particular the third sector. While local devolution processes in Italy date back to the 1990s, decentralization has only started to become more prevalent in France in recent years (Carpenter et al., 2020), as reflected in the latest revision of its City Policy.

In the context of an exacerbating crisis of affordability in Italian cities, and in Milan in particular, non-profit organizations have increasingly played a greater role in the provision of affordable housing for those who cannot keep up with the high costs of the private rental market, including university students and young workers. Public housing providers, i.e. not-for-profit organizations operating at the province-level, often enter into partnership with third-sector actors, including volunteer associations, foundations, cooperatives, or social enterprises. Through these partnerships, providers are able to restructure, allocate and manage unused dwellings. In this context, a new framing of social mix has emerged. A large part of this stock is located in neighborhoods that concentrate households with multiple vulnerabilities, such as low-income elderly people or people with a disability. Allocating units to youth who are motivated to start social activities with and for their neighbors is

thus seen as a way of bringing in human and social capital to revitalize the urban and social environment of these estates, while broadening access to affordable housing.

In France, non-state actors have long played a role in implementing social and housing policies at the local level, partnering with municipalities and public landlords across cities such as Paris to pursue an agenda largely driven and influenced by the local council or the national City Policy (Nicholls, 2005). Social mix is a core feature of many such programs, a concept not only ingrained in the official policy framework, but also central to the driving aims and visions of many implementing, non-governmental organizations.

While such programs tend to be modest in scale, they are shaping alternative conceptions of social mix in practice: both in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and in approaches to implementation. A central innovation in these programs is the more hands-on role played by the housing organization and its personnel. Non-governmental organizations have the liberty to move away from the universalist approach enshrined in the French model to target specific groups, such as youth and, even more specifically, youth motivated by a social purpose. These alternative conceptions contribute new perspectives on social mix to the existing literature, which predominantly documents the lack of encounters across different residential tenure groups in socially mixed areas (Lelvrir, 2013; Rose et al., 2013). The case studies presented in the next section represent an example of such innovative programs.

Description of mixed housing programs

Ospitalit Solidale (Milan)

The project Ospitalit Solidale in Milan is an example of intentional social mix. It is the result of a public-private partnership, through which the City Council has conferred housing cooperative DAR=Casa the right to renovate and manage 24 vacant social housing dwellings in two public housing neighborhoods, *Niguarda* and *Molise-Calvairate*. The renovation of the dwellings is financed by a national funding program under Italy's national youth policy. The renovated flats are small studios, about 25 square meters each, scattered throughout different housing estates and on different floors within each estate. Both neighborhoods are predominantly inhabited by large, migrant families with children, and solitary elderly people aged over 65. The project was launched in 2014, with short-term tenancies ranging from a minimum of three months up to two years. Dwellings are provided at below-market rent to 24 youth aged 18-30.

In addition to DAR=Casa, the socio-cultural association ARCI and the social cooperative Comunit Progetto help implement the social animation activities conducted in the neighborhoods. Youth who apply for this program are not only mobilized by the need to find an affordable home but are expected to interact with their neighbors through carrying out useful actions. Youth are thus granted access to affordable housing in exchange for committing time (ten hours per month) for social activities (e.g. gardening, convivial moments) as part of their rental agreement. This program provides opportunities for youth to live independently while creating a new way of living together in diversity, where youth purposefully contribute their resourcefulness to liven up disadvantaged neighborhoods and to interact with its residents, ultimately boosting opportunities for social inclusion. Their commitment to help develop community-oriented activities in the neighborhood in which they live also qualifies them as

‘resourceful’. Their actual resourcefulness as well as suitability for this program is assessed by housing practitioners through interviews.

Kolocation à Projets Solidaire (Paris)

Kolocation à Projets Solidaire (KAPS or *home-sharing solidarity projects* in English) is a program for university students run by the non-governmental organization, Association de la Fondation Etudiante pour la Ville (AFEV). Established in 2010, the program now operates in 33 cities across France. It aims to promote encounters between residents of diverse socio-economic backgrounds and to build capacity for civic engagement among university students who are motivated to advance social equality in their local neighborhoods. It does this by providing affordable, home-share accommodation in or next to City Policy priority neighborhoods to teams of five to six students, who commit to organizing solidarity activities with their social housing neighbors. Being an enrolled university student aged 18-30 is the only objective eligibility criteria for the program. Shifting the focus to capacity building in youth reflects an effort to overcome the culture of poverty paradigm, mobilizing an *éducation populaire* (popular education) approach which posits that all actors learn from engaging in activities with a social purpose. In practice, as we will later explore, this can come into tension with the expectations of other local actors, and also with deeply ingrained perceptions of the poor that alternative narratives and approaches must struggle to overcome.

Qualifying characteristics of youth who apply are discerned via collective and individual meetings and include the capacity to work in a team and to home-share, reliability, and whether an applicant’s values and attitudes align with those of AFEV (e.g. solidarity, desire to overcome inequality). Tenancies last one year and are renewable, provided youth are still enrolled in study. In both Paris and Milan, practitioners offer youth short-term tenancies envisaging a temporary stay in target neighborhoods. As we will see further on, the transient nature of their stay can pose a challenge to efforts to achieve long-term outcomes. In the next two sections, we present our research methods and findings.

Data collection and analysis

This paper is based on original qualitative data collected under two separate, larger research projects. In Paris, research was conducted with students, AFEV practitioners, officials, and other local actors in relation to the Blémont social housing estate in Paris’s 18th district. The Blémont estate is made up of 8 blocks of a total of 760 units and 2600 tenants. It is managed by public social landlord Paris Habitat which, together with the local council, is a core partner to AFEV in both the definition and management of the project. We collected eighteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews, including four students. Before a specific case study neighborhood had been identified, initially all six teams of KAPS students who were engaging across the 18th district at the time were invited via email to participate in the research. Two teams who had large-scale projects underway (a street party and collective street fresco respectively) responded positively. Three teams responded negatively, either because they had already undertaken their core actions for the year or because the team had ceased to function well, and one team did not respond at all. Of the two teams who responded positively, research was initiated with both teams but continued into a second year with the team that was

intervening in the *Blémont* neighborhood, as three of the original five students signed up for a second year, providing continuity. A final point is that only four of the five original students in the Blémont team agreed to find time to be interviewed, reflecting motivation dynamics within the team. It is thus important to note that the interview selection process of KAPS students favors teams that are functioning well and students that are motivated. As such, this case can be read as an exploration of the possibilities of the KAPS model when students are motivated by the social dimensions of the project (rather than a model that would function irrespective of student motivations), pointing to the need for robust recruitment processes (discussed later in the paper). One limitation to bear in mind then, is that our findings do not necessarily represent the varied experiences of KAPS students across the 18th district.

Our interviews also included two AFEV personnel (the coordinator of KAPS in the 18th district of Paris, and the staff member responsible for KAPS in AFEV's Ile-de-France headquarters) and three personnel from core partner organizations (public landlord Paris Habitat and the 18th district council's local development team), making up all the core institutional actors involved with the KAPS Blémont project. We also interviewed a former AFEV volunteer who had supported a KAPS team in the 18th district, a contact obtained through the AFEV coordinator. Three employees of local organizations and one resident who volunteered in a local association, all of whom collaborated with the KAPS students in the organization of the Blémont street party, were interviewed. We were able to identify them as the team's main collaborators on the ground by participating in meetings and actions organized in the lead up to the street party and in conversation with KAPS students. Finally, four social housing tenants were also interviewed. The tenants interviewed contributed to the Street Party in different ways and had multiple encounters with KAPS students, to the point of establishing social ties. They were identified with KAPS students. Interviews took place in 2018 over a six-month period, averaging about two hours each.

In Milan, we collected thirteen interviews, including four in-depth interviews with young tenants of Ospitalità Solidale (two from each neighborhood in which the program is implemented as a means to attain some balance in presenting the realities of each targeted neighborhood). We also interviewed six practitioners from involved organizations (three practitioners from housing cooperative DAR=Casa, two practitioners from association Comunità Progetto and one from association ARCI). Three additional semi-structured interviews were held with local policymakers from the Department of Housing within both the City Council and the Lombardy Region. These interviews were collected on an irregular basis, beginning in 2017 until February 2020. All local policymakers who took part in this study were directly contacted via email and responded positively to the interview invitation.

As for the practitioners, the recruitment process followed a snowball approach. We first addressed practitioners from DAR=Casa, as this cooperative has major responsibilities for the whole project. Therefore, the proportion of practitioners from this cooperative we interviewed is higher than other categories of interviewees. These practitioners provided us with contacts of project managers responsible for the project in each neighborhood (ARCI association in the *Niguarda* neighborhood and Comunità Progetto in the *Molise-Calvairate* neighborhood). In both cases, there was only one person per organization responsible for the project in each neighborhood (in one case the project manager was accompanied by a project assistant who also took part in the interview). So, despite the limited numbers, all relevant people directly involved in this project took part in the study, providing valuable knowledge of all the main issues at stake. Practitioners also provided contacts for youth.

This strategy for reaching youth has some potential implications for our findings, as the participating youth may reflect practitioners' preferences to select the most active and 'reliable' tenants. Concentrating on this subsection of youth could bring about a social desirability bias, i.e. youth feeling 'performance pressure' to only share positive experiences to avoid negative reactions from practitioners. However, as our findings demonstrate, this risk did not materialize, as respondents were open to discussing both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences. The spirit of their contributions did not reflect a relationship of being held to account by practitioners but suggested a collaborative relationship that more closely resembles the accompaniment approach envisaged in the French case. This is a point we return to later in the paper.

Another key point relates to the length of residence. Among the four youth interviewed in Milan (three workers and one student), two were more established residents of the neighborhood (having lived there for one and a half and two years respectively) while two others had been living in the estates for a few months only (roughly one to six months). Combined with the more longstanding experiences reported by practitioners, the mix of young tenants with different lengths of residence provided a wider and balanced vision of the dynamics under investigation.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to extract information on three specific subjects:

- (1) Housing practitioners' expectations of 'intentional' social mix: what do they expect to happen in the program?
- (2) What practitioners do to realize such expectations: what actions do they take to help create and support encounters and a common project among diverse residents?
- (3) The realities of 'intentional' social mix: how do practitioners' expectations play out in practice? How do their discourse and actions shape these outcomes?

The next section presents our findings.

Findings

In this section we provide an overview of practitioners' expectations about encounters across diversity in these mixed housing programs; an exploration of their role in initiating and supporting encounters; and a discussion about the conditions on the ground that shape the nature and realities of encounters.

Housing practitioners' expectations

At the heart of both programs is the premise that youth who are motivated to participate in activities with a social purpose within socially mixed residential spaces can initiate or contribute to encounters across diversity. As noted, this 'intentional' mix approach seeks to springboard off youth commitment to reach out across diversity in the local space, in contrast to the indifference that traditional approaches to social mix place on the motivations of the 'middle class' when moving to a renewed neighborhood (Bacqué et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the expected benefits of mix remain similar: practitioners expect that regular encounters and dynamic activity among diverse neighbors can reduce the social isolation of a high proportion of solitary elderly tenants in these residences; break down barriers and micro-segregation across different strata of the population; and increase civic participation. In both programs, it is expected that youth can collaborate with and

provide a boost to local initiatives that encourage social tenants to participate in neighborhood life and to connect to local services and associations. This is where efforts to address material deficit in these neighborhoods comes into play. In connecting social housing residents to local networks and opportunities, it is envisaged, for example, that they can dialogue about their needs in terms of resources and amenities both informally (e.g. through the council's local development officers) and formally (e.g. through participatory budgeting schemes); learn about grants for which they may be eligible; and, in the case of youth, receive support from local associations to find internships or training opportunities. This reflects a highly institutionalized approach to neighborhood development where neighborhood associations (and to some extent, youth themselves) effectively act as extensions of the State and implementers of its policies. In this way, motivated youth are as much effective agents of the State as they are vectors of social mix.

Notwithstanding such similar expectations, significant variations exist in the narratives that each program has about 'motivated' youth and the social tenants with whom they interact. In Paris, AFEV's program is based on the premise that young people desire to feel 'useful' to society and are searching to "broaden their horizons." AFEV is convinced that "youth want to invest in society, as long as they have the space to do so. They are looking for meaning, eager for solidarity, and in search of concrete action" (AFEV, 2020 p. 8) (our translation).

This expected social motivation is markedly more ambitious than the diversity-seeking that Blokland and Van Eijk (2010) find fails to translate into the establishment of diverse social networks. Affordable housing is therefore not intended to motivate students to act, but rather to *enable* youth, who are taken to be self-motivated, to participate by freeing up their time. Given the high cost of housing in Paris, low rents are expected to relieve students of the need to take on part-time work. In Milan, a more explicit *quid pro quo* narrative underlies the program, offering below-market priced housing as an incentive for youth commitment to contribute to social cohesion, included as an explicit condition of their tenancy. These different framings of housing provision explain the distinct ways in which housing practitioners manage youth engagement, at least at the level of project design. In Milan, housing professionals adopt an accountability management approach, holding youth to account over their engagement and responsibilities toward self-organized activities. In contrast, in Paris, greater emphasis is placed from the outset on youth accompaniment and capacity building for civic engagement, through training as well as practical, step-by-step support. In practice, the boundaries between these two approaches can be somewhat blurred. In Milan, practitioners play a more hands-on role than initially anticipated, while in Paris, accountability does enter into AFEV's relationship with the KAPS students owing to targets set by external funding bodies (e.g. the social landlord). This is because such funding bodies have an obligation to ensure the program contributes to their own organizational goals.

Another difference relates to the expected beneficiaries of social mix. The Paris case promotes a bi-directional, or reciprocal, exchange embedded in AFEV's pedagogical approach of *éducation populaire* ('popular' education), whereby both students and social housing tenants have the potential to be resourceful and to benefit and learn from their encounters across diversity. In the Milan case, benefits are expected to flow mainly in one direction, from resourceful youth to social tenants, resembling more the traditional role model approach (see Kleinhans, 2004). This means that in Paris, unlike Milan, students are not expected to organize actions *for* but rather *with* their social housing neighbors, to tap into and boost existing local initiatives and to help identify resourceful people with

whom the social housing landlord can liaise directly. In this way, AFEV attempts to depart from culture of poverty assumptions, reframing lower income residents as being resourceful and not simply recipients of the actions and example of the students. In the same way, KAPS students are not expected to come into the project as perfect models, as the middle class were treated in traditional social mix approaches, but rather as being able to learn from and grow through this experience. In the next subsection, we explain how professionals, as housing managers, play a critical role in promoting conditions for encounters across diversity and explore how these ideals translate into practice and challenges encountered on the ground.

Practitioners' actions to promote encounters

Practitioners' actions fall into four critical housing management activities (Priemus et al., 1999): the selection of neighborhoods, the allocation of dwellings, the recruitment of tenants, and the support and guidance provided to youth.

The institutional embeddedness of 'intentional' social mix within France's official urban policy leads to a more structured program than that of Italy. This is clearly visible from the criteria used to select target neighborhoods or estates. In France, neighborhoods must fall under the City Policy 'priority neighborhood' category, though neighborhoods that are considered too problematic or dangerous are increasingly excluded in an attempt to avoid exposing relatively inexperienced youth to difficult environments. How 'problematic' neighborhoods are identified, and the extent to which doing so inadvertently stigmatizes these places, is a question that bears examination but is beyond the scope of this present paper.

In sharp contrast, in Italy, the logic underpinning both the selection of neighborhoods and the allocation of dwellings comes down to haphazardly 'grabbing opportunities' wherever they arise. This can be explained by the absence of a well-structured urban agenda at the national scale comparable to that of France, which defines explicit criteria for implementing social mix. The project is in this case implemented through a partnership between local third sector organizations and the City Council, which channels funding to refurbish the dwellings. These diverging strategies result in different local conditions shaping encounters across diversity. In Paris, the Blémont housing estate is located within a semi-gentrifying neighborhood, described as an 'island' of low-income social housing within a more affluent, largely private tenured area. In contrast, the Milan project is located within a neighborhood that is considered deprived and composed predominantly of social housing.

As for the allocation of dwellings, at the time the research began, the Paris students lived in studio apartments in a student housing residence located within the same neighborhood as the Blémont estate (a five-minute walk), but not within the estate itself. They thus share many neighborhood spaces and amenities with Blémont residents, but not the living space itself. In September 2018, they moved into a purpose-built home-share residence for all KAPS students in the 18th district (within another priority neighborhood, slightly further away from the Blémont estate). In Milan, dwellings are assigned wherever a unit happens to become available. This has resulted in a pepper-potting social mixing approach, whereby some youth end up living in the same building as the social housing tenants with whom they are expected to interact, while others are scattered across different estates but also within the same neighborhood. As other studies have found (Arthurson, 2010; Jupp, 1999; Lelévrier, 2013), the distinct spatial configuration of social mix influences the extent to which residents—in this

case youth—encounter and get to know their neighbors and one another. Across France, AFEV has also found that an ‘everyday’ social mix is better facilitated in sites where students are housed within the social housing estates and share buildings with its residents, though collective initiative and action among students is reinforced in the student residence model (the case in Paris). This will be discussed later in the paper.

The quality of the housing and the surrounding neighborhood is another condition that is found to impact youth motivation. The studio flats in Paris are relatively new and the new residence is purposely built for groups of 5 to 6 students to live together, whereas in Milan the flats are one-person studios, refurbished but located within low-quality public housing complexes. In Milan, the lack of investment and dynamism in the neighborhood weakens youth commitment to the project and the time they desire to spend there, leading some youth to have the impression that “nothing happens here.” This is in stark contrast to the KAPS students who are on the whole very satisfied with the quality of their apartments and, living in a bustling, semi-gentrified but nonetheless ‘*populaire*’ (working class) neighborhood of the 18th district, are also motivated to spend their time locally alongside a range of residents including Blémont tenants. Unlike their French peers, Italian ‘resourceful’ youth benefit from several on-site common rooms and a garden within which they can implement their activities.

The selection of youth is another central condition. In both cases, there is an effort to recruit youth who are motivated to contribute to the organizations’ core social agenda. For practitioners in both Paris and Milan, motivation to take part in solidarity activities with neighbors is a key criterion to selecting suitable candidates, sought out through individual and/or collective meetings. As noted, this vetting procedure is a key departure from traditional social mix approaches. French practitioners target the student population specifically, who have in common the experience of being university students. Regarding social mix objective of the program, there is an assumption that university students come predominantly from a middle-class background—according to AFEV officials, this is often, but not always, the case.

In contrast, Italian practitioners target both students and young workers who might consequently be at different life stages, with different priorities and time availability to dedicate to the project, leading to different neighborhood uses and role repertoires (Blokland, 2003).

Despite this difference, there is agreement across both cases that “it takes time” to feel at home and to establish a regular pattern of activity with residents, which can come into tension with the short-term duration of tenancy contacts and the turnover rate of youth. As one student in the Blémont neighborhood shares: “What is difficult is that it is extremely slow and often we leave after one year. One year is not very long to develop relationships.” A high turnover of youth can also undermine the continuity of certain activities. The approach promoted in both cities to provide a ‘boost’ to the existing activities of local organizations or resident groups, rather than initiating new projects, can go some length toward avoiding this challenge, but nevertheless needs to be complemented by longer periods living in the neighborhood. The student cited above ultimately chose (along with two other teammates) to stay on a second year. Further consideration could be given to encouraging such decisions which, in the program’s current design, ultimately lie with the individual youth. In Milan, contract renewal is possible, but only if certain specified conditions (beyond the volition of youth) are in place, reflecting the *ex-post* conditionality mechanisms at work in the Italian program (Costarelli et al., 2020). One condition is the age of the youth. Another condition is that practitioners

give a positive assessment of youth commitment, participation, contribution to activities, and suitability to the project. This approach to renewal demonstrates the extent to which, in the design of the program in Milan, accountability is intended to drive motivation within what is essentially envisaged as a contractual exchange (affordable housing in return for socially oriented activities).

Another key difference is that youth in Milan are not formally part of a team, as is the case in Paris, even though they do end up organizing actions collectively. In Paris, youth describe being in a team as “reassuring” and as a means to “count on others” as well as to fuel ideas and increase motivation. This collective momentum appears to be integral to the success of the program. However, the demonstrated value of formalizing groups of youth should not be seen as a panacea, particularly as the data suggests that the ‘group effect’ cuts both ways: if a member of the group is less committed, this can undermine the motivation of the others, and youth appear to be particularly discouraged when they are let down by one another. Furthermore, by only including students in these teams (as opposed to including their social housing neighbors), an added layer of separation between the youth and their neighbors is introduced. In addition, while home-sharing in Paris can strengthen relationships within the group, it can pose potential challenges related to co-managing a household, which Italian youth do not have to deal with living alone in their single studios. As we will go on to explore, what seems to be important is that the glue that holds these teams together, when they function effectively, is a common social purpose and active commitment to the solidarity project, as well as bonds of friendship. It follows that in the Paris case, practitioners’ care extends into the private dimension of students’ lives, the home, where they mediate if needed to ensure a positive experience and to help sustain initiative within the neighborhood.

Another task of practitioners is supporting and guiding youth in their actions and progress. Despite diverging philosophies for managing youth (accompagnement in Paris versus accountable self-organization in Milan), in practice these approaches converge more than initially anticipated. In Paris, housing practitioners accompany students through various stages of planning, acting, reflecting, and reporting. They provide formal training which is both practical (e.g. neighborhood visits, project methodology, budgeting, poster design) as well as conceptual (e.g. on French urban policy, migration issues). They also provide morale-boosting encouragement. This approach to accompaniment stems from the expectation that students exit the program with enhanced capacity to arise as socially engaged citizens but that, as relatively inexperienced youth, they need support to learn to translate their aspirations into reality. Limited funding means that, in reality, AFEV personnel can be stretched too thinly across a growing number of KAPS teams to systematically deliver on this level of accompaniment. Nevertheless, from the perspective of AFEV’s strategic partners and the students themselves, this only serves to underscore the need for such support.

In Milan, despite an initial expectation of relatively autonomous self-organization, practitioners ultimately step in to play a more hands-on role in response to what they perceive as a lack of self-regulation and fluctuating motivation. Like Paris, these actions consist of participating in meetings with youth to help them plan. However, they also go further by pre-organizing some activities themselves and inviting youth to participate, ultimately exercising power to shape youth behavior and increase opportunities for encounters. As one youth reports: “They put in front of you all the possibilities you have to participate, so you don’t have to make too much effort, you can just join the activity.” They also introduce tools intended to account for youth efforts, e.g. monthly self-registration of performed tasks. This unexpected shift brings the role of Italian practitioners closer to

the accompaniment practiced by their French peers, though shows that Italian practitioners ultimately become significantly more interventionist than their French counterparts. This has potential implications for the extent to which youth are actually empowered to act resourcefully and appears to demonstrate a need for greater forethought about an accompaniment process that seeks to nurture and develop potential youth resourcefulness.

Italian practitioners also introduce a greater degree of flexibility than initially foreseen, which is characteristic of the French *modus operandi*. In Paris, though KAPS students are expected to devote five hours to the project each week, it is also expected that this number will fluctuate to accommodate the rhythm of student life: hours will inevitably drop during examination periods but hopefully rise when students are organizing major social activities. As such, practitioners do not monitor hours closely. This also reflects a spirit of seeing students as volunteers, and not as free laborers for AFEV or the public sector. Milan practitioners also show pragmatism based on the understanding that they have to be flexible to accommodate the unstable life plans of youth and their rapidly changing needs. However, this need for greater flexibility results in ambiguity and comes into tension with an accountability approach toward ensuring fulfilment of the ten hour per month-volunteering quota, which is a formal condition of the tenancy agreement in Milan. We now focus on the realities of social mix on the ground.

Conditions for encounters on the ground

Our findings bring into focus three conditions as being particularly relevant for encounters across diversity in the context of intentional social mix programs: (i) a frequent and visible presence in the neighborhood/estate, facilitated by an on-site physical space for activities and related place-making processes; (ii) encounters that are characterized by openness and welcome; and (iii) the recruitment of receptive youth who proactively seek to encounter their neighbors across diversity. We explain this in detail.

In Paris, a frequent, visible everyday presence is found to be more conducive to creating repeated encounters and to mobilizing residents to engage in their neighborhood. This practice arose out of dissatisfaction with one-off events, which students find have little longer-term impact beyond a brief moment of conviviality. Thus, the Blémont street party, which the KAPS students are co-organizing with a collective of local actors and organisations, gives rise to a longer process of reaching out to social housing residents to elicit their participation. Every 1-2 weeks, they set up a stand offering beverages and snacks. Their focus on adjoining buildings facing a single courtyard enables repeat encounters and the building of rapport. The students do not hesitate to energetically chase after tenants coming back from work or school-runs to introduce themselves and encourage them to contribute to the organization of the street party. Though in small numbers, some residents hang around, chat with one another, and interact with the children playing ball in the courtyard. Another association joins the students from time to time to film tenants speaking about their neighborhood for a video that will be projected at the street party. This corresponds with Amin's (2012) vision of habitual encounters taking place through participation in common projects.

Furthermore, in talking to their neighbors about *contributing* to the organization of the party, the students' discourse reflects AFEV's narrative of framing both youth and social housing tenants as resourceful, as well as students' perceptions of their own role as opening up a space for Blémont

residents to bring their neighbors together. One KAPS student explains how she was conscious of not seeing herself as a ‘savior’ of this neighborhood, choosing instead to consider herself as just another resident who aspires “simply to give time to where I live, so that I also want to live here.” This is also reflected in her efforts to get to know and converse with people “on an equal footing”, not as residents of a social estate but as “whole people” with “a whole history behind them.”

In this way, the students’ actions do manage, at times, to transform what has been lived by many tenants as a place of passage into a moment of shared conviviality and encounters. Students do stress that an on-site room would significantly increase the potential of these encounters, particularly during the colder months. The students build ties with a small number of more engaged tenants, with whom they go for coffee, assist with errands, share holiday snaps, or visit at their homes, and some tenants also get to know one another better, “putting a name to a face” as some of them share.

Furthermore, a small number of Blémont social housing tenants contribute to the organization of a neighborhood street party, by organizing craft and dance workshops, participating in preparatory meetings, refereeing soccer games, donating and serving food, face-painting, setting up, or inviting other residents. A large number of social tenants attend the street party, and some report that the event contributes to more positive representations of the estate and of one another.

Yet despite youth intentions, in its first edition the street party largely remains something organized *for* the neighborhood, and not by them. The hope of local officials and organizations is that, going forward, social housing tenants gradually take greater ownership of its organization, so that the event will reflect their needs and aspirations. This will require learning to foster inclusive collective processes that can elicit much wider involvement and commitment leading up to the event. For example, consultative spaces would need to be created and mediated in ways that encourage a diversity of views to be expressed and valued, particularly the views of the AFEV students and, most importantly, Blémont tenants. In this respect, one particular challenge to overcome is that of groups of residents with more professional experience taking on the role of arbiters of what a successful event looks like. Avoiding this will require a conscious and sincere effort to ensure that *culture of poverty* assumptions do not color the perceptions that institutional actors and other residents have of social housing residents and their capacity to contribute to such processes. Ultimately, all residents must be recognized as having the potential to be resourceful, a capability that has already been demonstrated by a number of social tenants in the street party’s first iteration. Finally, it seems necessary that any indicators of success for the event must include eliciting wide participation. In this way, the street party can go beyond a moment of conviviality, to become a common project, in which diverse residents of the neighborhood are engaged.

In Milan, spatial proximity is a condition for repeated encounters, but everyday encounters tend to be easier among young people living in the same building rather than *in situ* social tenants (e.g. the elderly and families). One youth shares, “we youth share a lot together, e.g. going out for dinner or dancing, especially if we live close to each other, so encounters are even more frequent.” Youth find that they have more in common with each other including similar needs that lead them to exchange material help (e.g. sharing a Wi-Fi connection). There seems to be a gap in frequent encounters across diversity, with youth reporting that “the other families, although they’re nice, have their own lives and it’s more difficult to make connections”. This finding appears to repeat shortcomings of traditional mix approaches, where social interaction is limited to instrumental exchanges largely among residents of similar social backgrounds (Chaskin & Joseph, 2011). Furthermore, interviewed

youth in Milan claim that in some cases, encounters with *in situ* tenants “do not go beyond saying hello”, and that their overall reactions to the activities triggered by the youth vary greatly, making it difficult to draw a univocal pattern. In some cases, it depends on the social group. Isolated elderly residents have more time to participate in convivial activities, such as dinners in the common rooms organized by the youth in collaboration with practitioners. In contrast, some of the migrant families are more hesitant to join and instead spend much of their time at home caring for their families—unless these families are mobilized to participate in purposeful activities. For example, an Italian language class for Arab mothers is considered to be a success of this program. This again further supports the value of common projects as a means to facilitate repeated encounters across diversity (Amin, 2012). ‘Parallel lives’ continues to be the norm unless a common project, about which *in situ* residents feel concerned and involved in (though not obliged) exists (Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013). Again, this highlights the need for *in situ* residents to be seen as resourceful alongside the youth, and thus to be more actively included in the definition and design of such projects, rather than being treated as the recipients of these activities. The nature of the encounters that take place—i.e. what actually happens when youth interact with *in situ* tenants—is also fundamental. In some buildings in Milan, intergenerational conflicts occur between the newly arrived youth and their elderly neighbors, which can exacerbate the already difficult socio-economic living conditions of some households. As one youth reported: “it’s a fragile environment, so someone may welcome new activities and new people around their estate, while others are absolutely against them.” This leads some youth to limit interactions to more formal greetings.

In Paris, despite mixed reactions from tenants (particularly when door knocking), it is the experiences of hospitality and encouragement from a number of social housing tenants—as well as the handful of tenants with whom they engage in repeated encounters and establish social ties—that appear to shape the students’ overall impression of being warmly welcomed in the neighborhood.

Though marginal, other aspects of the French case correspond with practitioners’ expectations of reduced isolation, particularly among solitary elderly tenants and shifting mutual perceptions. In Paris, an elderly resident shares how, in getting to know the KAPS students, she overcomes pre-conceptions that their university education would make them arrogant, stating: “I always said to myself, oh, they are doing long studies, they will have big heads, thinking to themselves: ‘We study, we know things, we know many things they don’t.’ I thought they would judge us. Yet it’s not at all the case.” In another example, some local residents report that seeing Blémont (social tenant) youth volunteer to cook a barbeque at the street party changes their perceptions of them and helps to establish rapport, so that they begin to say hello to one another. These examples lend weight to the assumption that encounters across diversity facilitated through social mix can shift perceptions, as is presumed in much mainstream social mix theory (Kleinhans, 2004). At the same time, this also validates the premise that a reframing of social mix is needed for the intended encountering to materialize.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper compares recently emerged ‘intentional social mix’ approaches in two mixed housing programs in Milan and Paris. Such approaches offer temporary affordable housing solutions for youth who commit to devoting time and energy to organizing social activities with social housing neighbors

on a regular basis. Youth and social tenants embark on common projects, which offer opportunities for new encounters across diversity creating social mix through housing.

After outlining housing practitioners' expectations of 'intentional social mix', we focused on the conditions that promote and sustain encounters across diversity, including the role of housing practitioners. At the program-level, these conditions relate to the criteria guiding the selection of neighborhoods, the allocation of dwellings, tenant recruitment, and a combination of accompaniment and accountability approaches to managing youth engagement by housing practitioners. At the ground-level, these conditions translate into frequent and visible presence of youth in the neighborhood, i.e. neighborhood use (Blokland, 2003); the nature of the encounters—that they are open and welcoming; and a high degree of cohesion among youth themselves that enables a constructive collective dynamic.

This paper demonstrates how this emerging reframing of social mix qualifies housing as a potential 'micro-public', within which regular and shared social activities across diversity can take place in the way Amin (2012) envisages, producing patterns of social interaction that disrupt established cultural practices (and notably the practice of parallel lives). One way practitioners can strengthen this is to ensure that the common project—in these cases the social activities—is jointly defined with the local population, so that such activities are not being done to them, but rather are collectively conceived and owned. This also suggests that programs should be designed around the premise that resourcefulness can be an attribute of both social tenants and youth, with conscientious efforts made to counter the assumptions of deficit perpetuated by the culture of poverty theory: both in the design and objectives of the program, but also in the accompaniment and capacity building of youth.

This paper contributes to the literature by enriching the social mix debate on the limitations of role model theory and by proposing alternatives. It does this by drawing attention to two distinct approaches within intentional social mix projects. The first, exemplified through the Milan case, reframes *what* is being role modeled, moving away from the moral values and norms of the middle class, toward a modeling of the 'resourcefulness' of youth. The second approach, exemplified through the Paris case, does away with the idea of role models all together, and promotes instead the mutual value of two-way, or reciprocal, encounters across diversity. In this approach, both students and social tenants are conceived as having the capacity to be resourceful and as potentially learning from these encounters. Despite these ideals and expectations, in practice, neither approach ultimately manages to include low-income groups as equal participants in the creation and implementation of social activities. This suggests that they have not managed to completely unroot deep-seated assumptions about low-income populations, and specifically social housing tenants, as lacking something and in need of outside assistance—in this case, the initiative to come together in solidarity, and the tools and connections to access key resources. While far from the US context, this demonstrates the pervasiveness of culture of poverty theories even in Europe, and that untangling such ideas is a gradual process that must include low-income residents themselves.

This paper also contributes to the social mix debate by specifically considering the suitability of youth as social mix actors. Constructing and developing ways of engaging youth in structured activities is pivotal, with housing managers playing a key role in this (Chaskin et al., 2013). This study suggests that when carefully recruited and patiently accompanied by experienced housing practitioners, youth can tap into a reservoir of motivation and openness towards diversity to engage in encounters through common projects established with their neighbors. Yet, as with general experiences of social mix,

their physical—and temporary—presence alone in mixed neighborhoods is insufficient to translate their aspirations into reality over the long-term. The risk of reproducing narratives of parallel lives with their new neighbors as described by Camina and Wood (2009) is indeed present, underscoring the importance of the above-mentioned conditions. Furthermore, while much effort is undertaken to build capacity in youth to participate in civic life, little attention is paid to building capacity of *in situ* residents. Extending ‘resourcefulness’ as an attribute of all residents, that encounters across diversity can help to develop, necessitates further thought about how such resourcefulness can be tapped into among willing participants of the broader local population.

This paper also develops the idea of ‘motivated youth’, whose social motivation goes much further than the diversity-seeking middle class of Blokland and Van Eijk (2010). Even with socially driven motivations, these youth do not act in a vacuum but are immersed in a network of local actors with their own intersecting and somewhat contradictory practices and discourses, who are in turn operating within a policy space that continues to be shaped by a continued pervasiveness of culture of poverty mindsets. In addition, this motivation should be contextualized within the broader structural conditions of housing markets and the difficulty youth face accessing affordable solutions. From a youth’s perspective, access to affordable housing is a legitimate need and can be seen as complementary to the social project, rather than undermining or discrediting it. Practitioners thus frame youth motivation as being twofold: both as the need for housing and the aspiration to be active in the local space—both motivations are present and are not in contradiction. Nevertheless, the challenge for practitioners in their recruitment processes is to discern that affordable housing is not the only motivation. This implies that practitioners need to learn how to tap into a deeper sense of purpose within youth and to create environments and collective dynamics that can further impulse their efforts. How to achieve this in practice is a question for further research.

Finally, while social mix approaches tend not to address the broader structural causes of the poverty that is concentrated in neighborhoods like those featured in this paper, bringing youth into these neighborhoods opens up interesting avenues of exploration concerning the potential longer-term, generational effects of such programs if implemented at a wider scale. That is to say, intentional social mix interventions involving youth may help build their capacity to contribute to broader structural shifts in society. Younger generations are increasingly at the forefront of conversations and movements relating to key societal challenges like ecological and environmental sustainability, planting seeds for marginal but growing shifts in industries ranging from food to fashion. What seeds might be planted by bringing youth who would otherwise live at a distance from lower-income neighborhoods into these places, in ways that enable them to get to know the dynamics of these places and the people who inhabit them?

A framework that promotes encounters across diversity, like that of these programs, could contribute to raising youth consciousness of the realities of those afflicted by poverty and other vulnerabilities, including consciousness of the capacities and resourcefulness of this population. Might this consciousness lead to shifts in future generational perspectives and choices about where to live, with whom to interact, what causes and visions of the future to support in their future careers and civic participation? Youth may also become more convinced of their own resourcefulness to contribute to lasting change in society that aligns with their values.

Of course, the small scale of these interventions, and the limited duration of this research, is much too insignificant to explore these questions in any meaningful way. But we conclude with them as

important questions for future researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to consider, particularly in relation to the location and design of affordable housing for youth and students, and for how the period of university and youth more broadly is approached in relation to building capacity for civic participation. At the same time, care must be taken not to emphasize the potential changemaking role of youth to the detriment of the role of *in situ* residents of social housing estates who, as this paper argues, must also be seen and accompanied as resourceful actors in the reshaping of the neighborhood.

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