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Existing housing stock: How to improve the building quality?

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ABSTRACT
In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the improvement of the quality of the housing stock. Parts of the housing stock in Dutch cities do not meet the modern preferences of urban households and do not have sufficient housing quality. Improving this, demolition followed by new construction and renovation of the housing stock is necessary. The current instruments are not appropriate to improve the quality of the housing stock. Consumers and local authorities lack insight into housing quality and building regulations seem to be a barrier for the improvement of the housing stock. Solutions for these problems may be found in a proposal made by the Dutch Ministry of Housing. The proposed building file describes the quality condition of buildings and functions as a maintenance manual. It could support homeowners in fulfilling their responsibility for the quality of their dwellings and local authorities to develop quality policy. This paper describes the first results of recent research into the role of the Dutch Building File within the Dutch set of instruments to improving the quality of the housing stock; it compares the Dutch approach to comparable instruments currently in use or being developed in other European countries.

Keywords: Building regulations, housing stock, housing quality, building file, quality requirements.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the improvement of the quality of the housing stock. Parts of the housing stock in Dutch cities do not meet the modern preferences of urban households and do not have sufficient housing quality (Ministry of Housing, 2002). Meeting these preferences requires an

appropriate housing stock, which requires a quality improvement of the housing stock (demolition followed by new construction, renovation, product innovation) and facilitating the responsibility of homeowners for the quality of their housing, in conjunction with insight into housing quality. Therefore, the need to explore policy instruments for the improvement of the quality of the existing housing stock is of increasing importance.

Resent research shows that the current policy instruments are not appropriate to improve the quality of the housing stock (Companen, 2003, Klaver, 2003, OPB, 2001, Taskforce woningbouwproductie, 2002, De Vries et al., 2003, MDW-Working group, 2001). Consumers and local authorities lack insight into housing quality and building regulations seem to be a barrier for the improvement of the housing stock. Some of these studies mentioned some solutions how to improve these bottlenecks. One of the solutions for these problems may be found in a proposal made by the Dutch Ministry of Housing (OPB, 2001). The proposed building file describes the quality condition of buildings and functions as a maintenance manual. It could support homeowners in fulfilling their responsibility for the quality of their dwellings and local authorities to develop quality policy. However, until now none of the studies has explored alternative solutions.

This paper describes results of recent research into the role of the Dutch Building File within the Dutch set of instruments to improving the quality of the housing stock and compares the Dutch approach to comparable instruments currently in use or being developed in other European countries. The main question of this article is whether there are comparable policy instruments in other EU-countries that describe quality aspect in order to promote quality improvement and/or in order to give insight into housing quality. The following section describes the research objective and methodology, followed in the next section by a description of the problems in the Netherlands concerning housing quality and the related policy instruments. The third section also contains a description of the Dutch plans for a building file. Further, an overview of the alternative instruments in EU-countries is given in the fourth section. The paper ends with conclusions.

2. RESEARCH

The goal of our current research is to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of policy instruments regarding the quality of the existing housing and to explore alternatives instruments for the Dutch government for the improvement of the quality of existing housing.

The research is split up in three parts (figure 1). The first part of our research is to structure the policy problems concerning the quality of the existing housing stock and the policy instruments regarding the quality of the housing stock in the Netherlands. Desk research and interviews with experts in the building construction field are planned to study in depth the quality of the housing stock and the bottlenecks of the necessary quality improvement. The second part of our research is the exploration and construction of alternative instruments for the

improvement of the quality of the housing stock. An international comparison of policy instruments regarding the quality of the housing stock in European countries gains alternatives. Desk research and a questionnaire among experts were used to create an overview of European policy instruments. Finally, in the third part of the research the constructed alternative models will be tested and evaluated on effectiveness and efficiency. This will lead to recommendations for the Dutch government and a renewed insight in policy instruments for the improvements of the housing quality of the stock.

Currently, the first steps of the international comparison have been taken. This paper reports on the first results of this international comparison of policy instruments regarding the quality of the housing stock in European Union countries. An important reason for carrying out this international comparison is the idea of the Dutch government to introduce a building file; a document that contains all information on the building quality of a particular dwelling. Therefore the focus of our research was on instruments (partly) comparable with the Dutch Building File. These international equivalents can be helpful developing an effective and efficient Building File and estimating the effects of the introduction of such an instrument. In the future, the international comparison will be broadened and also other legal, economic and communicative instruments regarding the quality of the housing stock will be explored.

3. DUCTH SITUATION

3.1 Responsibility for housing quality

According to the Dutch Constitution, promoting sufficient housing is an important responsibility of the government. This responsibility is not only limited to the amount of housing but also concerns the quality of housing. Last decades, the concern more and more shifted from the quantity of housing to the quality of housing (VROM, 2000).

In addition to the governments' responsibility, homeowners are also responsible for the quality of housing. Recently, a proposal for an amendment has been designed that makes the homeowner directly responsible for the quality of his dwelling (VROM, 2004). Currently, the municipality can enforce the regulation compelling homeowners to improve the defects. When the homeowner does not repair the defects within a certain period, the municipality can take action. In the near future, the homeowner will be directly responsible for maintaining the dwelling and meeting the requirements of the Dutch Building Decree. In contrary to the current situation, municipalities can immediately take action when a building does not meet the requirements.

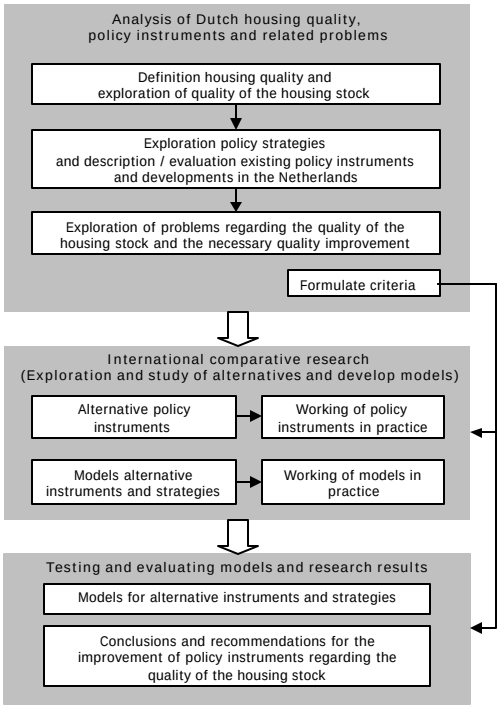

Figure 1: Research model.

3.2 Policy instruments

The government uses several policy instruments to improve the quality of housing. Policy instruments can be divided in three groups of instruments. Many researchers have studied and classified policy instruments (Hood, 1983, De Bruijn et al., 1998, Driessen et al., 2000). An often-used classification is the distinction between communicative, legal and economic instruments (Van der Doelen, 1989). In this paper, mainly the communicative and legal instruments are surveyed. In further research, the research will be broadened and also other types of instruments will be included.

In the Netherlands several policy instruments in different categories are used to improve the quality of the housing stock (Meijer et al., 2002, Van der Bos et al., 2004). Table 1 shows the instruments currently in use. Public law in the Netherlands contains several requirements that affect the quality of housing. The most important requirements regarding the safety, health, energy efficiency and usability of buildings are set in the Building Decree. The minimum level for existing housing is derived from the oldest known municipal and provincial building requirements, which date from the beginning of the twentieth century. In principle, the law states that no stricter requirements are valid than the

requirements that were legitimate when the building permit was issued. If a dwelling does not meet the requirements municipalities are authorized to enforce compliance, according to the Housing Law (Ministry of Housing, 2003a). Furthermore, the Housing Law sets some requirements for maintenance funds of homeowners' associations, the Rent Law sets requirements for the minimum quality in relation to a certain price level and several other laws impose specific quality requirements, as in those specified in the Gas Act for gas installations.

Legal instruments
In addition to public law, several private law provisions influence Dutch housing quality. Most newly built dwellings are delivered with a six-year guarantee of housing quality and a ten-year guarantee against technical defects. Furthermore, occasionally additional requirements are laid down in contracts or covenants between the municipality and market-parties. Recently, sustainability requirements are frequently laid down in a covenant between the municipalities and social housing associations.

Communicative instruments
The communicative instruments are divided in instruments informing buyers/users about the (quality of) housing, instruments registering housing data and instruments studying housing (quality) data. Civil law requires homeowners to inform prospective buyers about the quality and defects of the dwelling that is to be sold. Moreover, a range of different user and maintenance guides for dwellings are available, many of which are compiled on a voluntary basis.

Furthermore, information about housing and housing quality is often registered by different organizations. The Cadastre mainly registers legal information, for example deeds of conveyance and mortgage deeds. Furthermore, most municipalities keep a building registration up to date, in which information about address, size of the dwelling and number of rooms is registered.

Finally, research into housing and housing quality is carried out. Every four years, the Ministry of Housing carries out a national housing condition survey (KWR) and a housing preferences survey (WBO).

Economic instruments
Examples of economic instruments that are used to promote the quality improvement are subsidies for replacing lead pipes and asbestos in housing. Some municipalities grant subsidies for home improvement. Furthermore, a tax benefit promotes home improvement.

3.3 Quality improvement; the problems

Unless, the range of policy instruments in the Netherlands, the quality of the housing stock in some parts of Dutch cities is still unsatisfactory. Particularly, the early post-war housing estates consisting of apartment buildings with flats sharing a main entrance and high-rise building gallery flats do not meet the preferences of

the households living there and do not meet the current housing quality standards (Ministry of Housing, 2000 and 2003b).

To accomplish these housing preferences and the current quality standard a quality improvement of the existing housing stock is necessary (VROMraad, 1999). This can be achieved by demolition followed by new construction, sale, merge and renovation of dwellings. Specifically, the improvement of the existing housing stock is an important part of the task since new built construction decreased till less than 1% of the housing stock. When the current production of new housing would completely be used to replace the existing housing stock, it would take 100 years at least and the life span of an average building would be much more than 100 years (Thomsen, 2002). This leads to the conclusion that a quality policy operating through instruments promoting the quality of new construction is marginal.

Table 1: Dutch policy instruments regarding housing quality

Legal instruments	**Communicative instruments**	**Economic instruments**
Laws and public requirements: • Building Decree (building technical requirements) • Housing Law (Condominium act, building permit, enforcement) • Rent Law • Specific laws: Gas Act, Electricity Act, etc.	Information for users/buyers housing: • Legal obligation to inform the prospective buyer (Civil Law) • Manuals for the use and maintenance of a dwelling • Quality marks and labels; such as EPA, Woonkeur, Police Quality mark Secure Housing	Subsidies: • Subsidy for replacing lead pipes • Subsidy for eliminating asbestos • Subsidy for home improvement
Private law arrangements: • Guarantee certificate • Covenants and contracts	Registration of housing data (quality): • Cadastre • Municipal building registration	Taxes: • Tax benefit for home improvement
	Research into housing (quality): • KWR (Housing Condition Survey) and WBO (Housing Preference Survey)	

Despite the necessity to improve the housing stock, the renovation of the hardly has started. Various studies reported on the barriers in the urban renewal process and the quality improvement of the existing housing stock (De Vries e.a., 2003, Companen 2001, Taskforce Woningbouwproductie 2002). According to the Taskforce Housing Production three aspects are an important bottleneck. First, the complexity, the large scale of urban renewal, and the complex innovation

processes appear to be an important bottleneck. The many (legal) procedures and parties involved in the decision processes are often complex and time-consuming. Secondly, the public policy and regulations are complex. The building regulation consists of many different sub regulations. The national government as well as the regional and local government sets requirements on different fields. Finally, the capacity personnel shortages in municipalities and the building industry are a barrier. This shortage is in a qualitative (too less knowledge and skills) as well as quantitative (too less staff) sense.

However, this research focuses on the policy instruments (mainly regulation) involved in the quality improvement process of the housing stock. Regarding the regulations several bottlenecks are present. First the regulations are very complex, because of the enormous amount of different regulations in different fields, the time consuming procedures, the vagueness and difficulty to interpret the requirements and the frequently changes. Second, the regulations are mainly directed towards new construction. So the effect of quality policy operating through new construction requirements is marginal. Third, the regulations are almost not enforced in practice.

In reaction on these problems, the Ministry of Housing started various projects to diminish the bottlenecks and to simplify and decrease regulations. The Ministry developed and introduced various amendments (i.e. amendment Building Decree and Housing Law) and proposed an amendment that makes the homeowner directly responsible for the quality of his dwelling (Ministry of Housing, 2002 and 2004). Unless the amendment of the Housing law that creates a direct responsibility of homeowners for housing quality the problems still exists that homeowners lack sufficient insight into the actual housing quality. So the specially formed Building Regulations Platform (OPB) developed the idea to introduce a building file; a document that contains all kinds of data about (the quality of) a dwelling (OPB, 2001). This building file is developed in the light of the strengthened responsibility of homeowners for housing quality and intends to support homeowners in the care for their dwelling.

3.4 Dutch Building File

The main objective of the building file is to improve insight into the quality of buildings for homeowners, consumers (figure 2)). Many homeowners are not adequately equipped to assess the actual quality of a dwelling and may therefore have difficulty maintaining their dwellings. The proposed building file is intended to assist homeowners in fulfilling their responsibility to maintaining their houses, by creating a better insight into housing quality and also in the requirements their dwelling has to meet. Furthermore, many consumers lack insight into the actual quality of a dwelling and may therefore have difficulty choosing among different dwellings. Therefore, the proposed building file is intended to make the housing market more transparent. In addition, local authorities also need better information about their housing stock in order to develop specific policies concerning quality.

Finally, the building file would be expected to contribute to the improvement of housing quality (OPB, 2001).

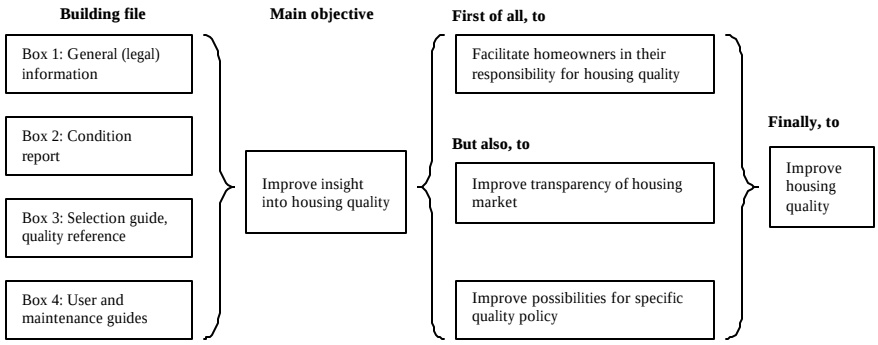

Figure 2: Contents and objectives of the Dutch Building File

The draft version of the building file consists of four boxes for information (Figure 2). The first box contains general information about the building, including address, owner and building type. The cadastre already records this type of information. The second and third boxes provide the necessary insight into actual quality. The second box describes the technical condition of the building, which is inspected and assessed according to the requirements specified in the Building Decree. The third box contains supplementary information, including the layout and size of the dwelling, installations, functional quality, environmental sustainability and facilities in the neighbourhood. This box functions as a selection guide and quality reference for consumers. The fourth box is voluntary and contains a user and maintenance guide for keeping the building in a good state of repair (OPB, 2003).

The homeowner is responsible for keeping the building file up to date, which requires periodic inspections of installations, major repairs and the building carcass. Sellers are required to make the building file available throughout the entire sales process, in order to give prospective buyers better insight into the quality of buildings. In addition, homeowners are required to submit copies of modified building files to local authorities following any inspections or relevant alterations, in order to keep the authorities' insight into the condition of their housing stock up to date. Local authorities will then be able to base their building quality policy on this insight, thus and develop specific policies for dilapidated neighbourhoods. The building file will also be able to function as a basis for serving improvement notices to owners of dwellings that do not meet the requirements. In this case, the building file would also be an instrument supporting the improvement of housing quality (OPB, 2001).

Recently, an experiment with technical building inspections by independent inspectors and the consultation of stakeholders were finished. The results will be used to improve the final format. The results show that the existing inspection methods are not appropriate to compose the Building File; a uniform inspection guideline is considered. In consultations with stakeholders, people criticized the wide scope and showed their concern for an increasing administrative and financial burden (Visscher et al., 2004). Currently, the building file focuses only on dwellings, but if it proves to be a feasible instrument, an additional building file will be developed for other types of buildings.

4. INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

4.1 Overview

Almost all EU-countries have policy instruments for improving the quality of the housing stock (Meijer et al., 2002, Van der Bos, 2004). Building regulations often contain requirements regarding the quality of existing housing. Additionally, several private law provisions like completion certificates and quality marks have an influence on housing quality. Furthermore, almost all countries have instruments that register and describe all types op information. Many EU-countries have a cadastre or a property register that contains general information about buildings (e.g., ownership and mortgage), but our research focused on the policy instruments that describe information about the quality aspects of buildings, such as quality labels, certificates and "building passports".

There appear to be two groups of instruments that describe quality aspects of buildings. First, some labels or building passport are created to give insight into housing quality in order to promote maintenance and improvement of the quality of a specific dwelling. Most energy labels, are used as an instrument to stimulate improvements of energy efficiency and energy savings. Second, some instruments are used to give prospective buyers information about the specific dwelling. It is assumed that the housing market is not transparent and consumers may have trouble assessing the actual quality of housing, rendering it difficult to make balanced choices between different houses. The Home Information Pack in the United Kingdom, for example, originated to streamline the buying and selling process. The Dutch Building File will try to combine these two objectives. It both will give insight into housing quality, and will promote to maintain and improve housing quality. However, improving housing quality seems to be the most important objective.

4.2 Energy labels

As a consequence of the EU-directive on the energy performance of buildings almost all EU-countries know energy labels. The EU-directive creates a framework for promoting the improvement of the energy performance of buildings. The directive states that from 2006 energy labels have developed systems for the energy certification of existing buildings. These certificates must be less than five years old and should be made available when buildings are sold or rented out (EPD, 2002/91/EG).

In Germany, various energy passports (Energiepassen) and heating passports (Wärmepässen) have been developed and introduced (LOGA, 2002). The Deutsche Energie Agentur (DENA) is working to develop a uniform energy passport for existing buildings, based on the EU-directive on energy performance (DENA, 2004). Denmark introduced an energy-labelling system in 1997 (Thomsen, 2003). Many European countries are currently developing such systems for measuring the energy efficiency of buildings.

On the one hand, energy labels are intended to provide information, mainly for consumers, concerning the energy-efficiency quality of dwelling. On the other hand, the labels also serve to make homeowners conscious of the energy performance of their houses and to decrease energy consumption. The energy labels use a standardize format to show energy performance and to describes recommendations for energy-savings measures, along with the associated costs and energy savings.

The contents of the energy labels vary. In Germany, energy labels are particularly diverse, as each city or region has its own label or certificate. Some labels contain only short descriptions of energy performance while others also contain information about energy-saving measures. Most energy labels contain the following information:

- General information (e.g. homeowner, address, building)
- Energy performance (e.g. yearly energy consumption and energy costs)
- Energy saving measures (e.g. costs and savings)
- Information about the building concerning energy performance (e.g., installations, insulations, ventilation).

The size and scope of energy labels varies strongly. In Germany, many labels are voluntary, with the result that only a small percentage of buildings have these labels. In Denmark, energy labels are part of a national program. In the first three and a half years of the program 12 percent of all small building had already been labelled.

The practical effects of the energy-saving measures have not been monitored, but the Danish government estimates that each household can save 20% in energy costs by adopting such measures. Approximately 26% of the owners of labelled dwellings had taken energy-saving measures after purchasing their dwellings, and an additional 21% plan to take the measures. Research in Germany has concluded that households with labelled dwellings tend to take energy-saving measures more often and earlier in order to improve the energy performance of their dwellings (IFEU, 2003).

4.3 Alternative building files

Many EU-countries do not only have energy labels, but also develop (or are currently developing) instruments that describe other quality aspects (Table 2). Germany for example has developed the Gebaudepass and the Hausakte, Spain the

Libro del Edificio en the United Kingdom the Home Information Pack and the Purchasers' Information Pack. Also in some regions of Italy exist building passports; Fascicolo del Fabbricato. These instruments are more or less comparable to the Dutch Building File. In the following sections the Home Information Pack, Hausakte and the Libro del Edificio are described more in detail.

Table 2: Overview of building files in European countries

Country	Name of building file
Germany	Hausakte / Gebaudepass
United Kingdom / Wales and England	Home Information Pack
United Kingdom / Scotland	Purchasers' Pack
Spain	Libro del Edificio
Italy	Fascicolo del Fabricato

4.4 Home Information Pack UK

In the United Kingdom, sellers of dwellings are not yet obliged to inform potential purchasers about the overall quality condition of the dwellings. A seller must, however, inform a potential buyer about hidden defects. In addition, independent inspectors survey most of the dwellings that are sold. A valuation assessment is often pre-requisite to obtaining a mortgage (ODPM, 2004a).

A recent proposal to introduce a Home Information Pack has been discussed in the English Parliament. With the introduction of this information pack, the government aims to streamline the buying process for consumers. This information pack is one of the key components of broader measures intended to reform the selling and buying process. These measures will require a homeowner to have a home information pack in order to sell a house. Prospective purchasers can receive copies of the information pack upon request.

The information pack is likely to contain documents and information for interested purchasers. This information is usually made available later during the buying process (ODPM, 2003):

- Terms of sale
- Evidence of title
- Replies to standard preliminary enquiries made on behalf of buyers
- Copies of any planning, listed building and building regulations consents and approvals
- Form for new properties, copies of warranties and guarantees
- Any guarantees for work carried out on the property
- Replies to local searches
- A home condition report based on a professional survey of the property, including an energy efficiency assessment

The packs contain additional information for leasehold properties, including:

- A copy of the lease

- Most recent service charge accounts and receipts
- Building insurance policy details and payment receipts
- Regulations made by the landlord or management company
- Memorandum and articles of the landlord or management company.

In December 1999, the government started a pilot project in Bristol to test the practical operation of home information packs. One of the main conclusions of the pilot project was that the packs do increase transparency in the buying process (ODPM, 2004b). Subsequently, the Homes Bill, including the plans for the home information packs, was introduced in the Parliament in December 2000. After successfully passage through the House of Commons, the Bill was introduced into the House of Lords and is currently subject to detailed scrutiny. Royal Assent is expected to be achieved by the end of 2004 (ODPM, 2004c).

4.5 Hausakte in Germany

In Germany, various initiatives have been taken to develop building passports (at both the local and the national level) to improve insight into the quality of housing. As in other countries, German consumers also have trouble assessing the quality of houses. Potential homebuyers have only general information (e.g., location, size and number of rooms) at their disposal. At the national level, the Bundesministeriums für Verkehr, Bau- und Wohnungswesen (BMVBW) developed the Hausakte in 2001. The building passport that is used in the district Schleswig-Holstein is an example of a regional-level building passport.

The building passport used in the district Schleswig-Holstein is similar to the Dutch building file. The instrument is used to document the most important technical and structural information about a house, including a short description of the building construction, its materials and any technical installations. Similar to the building file in the Netherlands, the Schleswig-Holstein building passport provides a potential buyer with an objective overview of the condition of the dwelling. The building passport is also included as part of the local property register (www.lbs-schleswigholstein.de).

The introduction of the Hausakte (building passport) is expected to improve consumer access to housing quality and increase the transparency of the housing market. The passport was developed as part of a project concerning costs and raising consciousness with respect to building quality. It is intended to replace a range of quality marks and building certificates in Germany. At present, the use and compilation of the building passport is voluntary for newly built single-family dwellings.

The first part of the building passport presents the characteristics of a building in a standardized format. It provides consumers with unambiguous and reliable insight into the fire safety, thermal and sound insulation, structural safety, health, hygiene and energy efficiency of the building. This part can be filled in and provided upon

completion of the building process. Aspects that are described in the Hausakte are as follows (Kompetenzzentrum, 2004):

- General information about the building (e.g., location, number of storeys)
- Extensive description of the construction, technical installations, energy certificate, permits and parties involved in the building process.
- Inspection and maintenance reports for installations and similar features.
- Costs concerning taxes, insurance, inspection reports and maintenance activities involving installations.
- Other maintenance activities.
- Inspection and overhaul certificates for ventilation and elevator systems.

To date, there are no statutory requirements prescribing a standard format for the contents of the building passport. In addition to the version used by the Ministry of Housing, approximately thirty building passports are available on the housing market (provided by governmental institutions, interest groups and private organisations), and these passports differ in both content and size.

Discussion has taking place about the Hausakte and the Gebaüdepass. In the first six months following its introduction at the end of 2001, the Ministry received approximately 3,000 Hausakte applications (Baupresse 24, 2002). The German government is also considering the introduction of mandatory building passports, which would also contain information about the energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings. Beginning in 2006, the registration of information about the energy performance of dwellings will be mandatory.

4.6 Libro del Edificio in Spain

Since 1999, a building file (Libro del edificio) has been obligatory for each new building. The compilation and use of the building file is mandatory, but each province or city ca, within certain limits, design its own standards for the building file. The Spanish building file is part of the Building Act (Ley sobre la Ordinacion de la Edificacion). At the end of the building process the building file is given to the homeowner or user. It includes the completion certificate, the list of all agents involved in the building process, and the instructions for use and maintenance of the building and its installations. The Spanish building is intended to be an instrument for monitoring the quality of the future housing stock.

The contents of the building file in Madrid contains the following information (Comunidad de Madrid, 2000):

- General information about the building (e.g., identification number, location);
- Characteristic of the building;
- Description and maps of the structure and installations of building, energy performance;
- List of all companies involved in the building process, activities performed and guarantees;

- Accreditation of the quality of products, construction processes, installations etc.;
- History of maintenance and alterations (e.g., dates, guarantees for work performed).
- User and maintenance guides for the complete building and for each apartment (obligatory and recommended maintenance, maintenance plan).
- Procedures for action in case of emergency (e.g., fire, explosion).
- Important documents (e.g., permits, insurance).

5. CONCLUSION

The main question of this article was whether there are comparable policy instruments in other EU-countries that describe quality aspects in order to promote quality improvement and in order to give insight into housing quality. The international quick scan shows that The Netherlands is not alone in developing a building file to support and assist homeowners and prospective buyers. Also other EU-countries are developing comparable building files that describe building quality, such as the Hausakte in Germany, the Libro del Edificio in Spain and the Home Information Pack in England/Wales. The rationale, objectives, scope and contents of the building (quality) files differ strongly, however.

The rationale and objectives of the alternative building files differ. In England and Wales, the Home Information Pack has been proposed as a compulsory part of the buying and selling process for dwellings, in order to streamline the process. The Hausakte was developed as part of a project concerning costs and raising consciousness with respect to building quality and is intended to replace a range of quality marks and building certificates in Germany. Furthermore, the scope of the instruments varies. The German Hausakte is a voluntary instrument that was introduced into the housing market on a limited scale in contrary to the Spanish Libro del Edifcio that is obliged for all new buildings. Finally, the contents of the building files are different in the EU-countries. The contents of the Spanish building files even differ regionally.

In the Netherlands, building files are being developed on a much broader scale; the files will not only inform homebuyers about potential dwellings, but also should give local authorities the information they need to form a sound basis for developing policy concerning housing quality and facilitate homeowners in their responsibility for housing quality. It is possible, however, that the document will be too extensive and complex, such that it becomes infeasible in practice. It will take time to provide each building owner with a complete building file, to keep these files up to date and to send copies of (all alterations of) the files to local authorities. In the near future, we will see whether the building file (with the content as proposed) will be feasible.

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