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‘Active, young, and resourceful’: sorting the ‘good’ tenant through mechanisms of conditionality

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ABSTRACT

Governments’ attempts to link the provision of welfare services to (more) responsible self-conduct of citizens (i.e. responsabilization) is seen as a distinctive feature of the post-welfare state. Responsibilization often requires welfare receivers to comply with specific duties or behavioural patterns (i.e. conditionality). Except for UK-based studies, little is known about responsabilization strategies of social housing tenants based on specific allocation policies or management approaches. To fill this gap, this paper examines recent cases of tenants’ responsabilization through conditionality, i.e. allocation of housing on the condition that receivers regularly engage in supportive activities, in Utrecht (The Netherlands) and Milan (Italy). Through a qualitative methodology, this paper unpacks the use of conditionality as a means to increase tenants’ responsabilization. The paper contributes by showing both innovative aspects, such as eligibility criteria, obligations, accountability measures, and potential pitfalls connected to diverging expectations between tenants and professionals, and to specific context-related factors.

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Introduction

In post-welfare states, the provision of social services, including social housing, is increasingly becoming conditional to the active and responsible behaviour of welfare claimants and, more generally, citizens. Social housing governance in post-welfare states does not only require tenants to refrain from prohibited or ‘anti-social’ behaviours, but also requires a positive and proactive engagement in acts of citizenship and voluntary endeavours (see Deacon, 2004; Flint, 2002, 2003, 2004; Flint & Nixon, 2006; Manzi, 2010; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2013).

Social housing in the new welfare state is characterized by a widening of tenants’ responsibility (Flint, 2004) and growing *conditionality*, a principle holding that ‘eligibility to certain basic, publicly provided, welfare entitlements should be dependent on an individual first agreeing to meet particular compulsory duties or patterns

of behaviour' (Dwyer, 2004, p. 269). Responsibilization strategies through conditionality assume increasing individual agency and accountability beyond traditional requirements associated with social housing tenure (e.g. allocation, rent payments and basic maintenance of properties) to include a greater involvement in community activities and proactive responses to discourage anti-social behaviours. Beyond the need to act in a legal manner, housing professionals in the UK and US¹ but also in Italy and the Netherlands, as this paper will show, increasingly require from tenants a proactive communal endeavour, suggesting an important shift in the conceptualization of responsibilization.

Conditionality represents a key tenet of tenants' responsibilization strategies implemented by social landlords in the context of a specific frame of social mix (see Costarelli *et al.*, 2019). Such frame differs from the mainstream use of social mix, i.e. increasing the share of middle-class 'role models' (especially middle-income households and homeowners), as it is not implemented in the context of state-driven urban regeneration programmes of most deprived social housing neighbourhoods. However, social mix in this new frame points to similar aims, such as spreading desirable norms of behaviour and shared values for particular social groups (Koster, 2015), promoting social integration and a more responsible conduct of social tenants.

The existing strand of literature covering the topic of responsibilization of social housing tenants in the new welfare state is largely drawing on UK-based studies (Flint, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2015; Flint & Nixon, 2006; Haworth & Manzi, 1999; King, 2006; Manzi, 2010). To fill this gap this paper takes in consideration current developments in two other EU countries: Italy and the Netherlands. Building on Borghi and van Berkel's (2007) comparative paper on Italian and Dutch welfare activation policies in labour and social care, which connoted a common shift towards a 'more active welfare state' (see also De Leonardis, 2011; Tonkens, 2011), we expand their contribution by considering on-going trends within social/public housing sectors. Several UK-based studies have focused on the efficacy of conditionality measures on welfare subjects affected by severe forms of deprivation, e.g. homeless people (see Johnsen *et al.*, 2018) or people subject to unemployment, disability, anti-social behaviour-related measures – the so-called 'urban precariat' (see Flint, 2019). However, in this paper we advance our understanding on responsibilization through conditionality in social housing by focusing on instances wherein conditionality mechanisms involve specific social groups, mainly young people, with few economic resources but strong social and human capital which is mobilized as part of these conditionality mechanisms.

As Stephens (2011) argued, dealing with housing research inevitably means taking into account wider socio-economic structures and institutions, including welfare systems. Adopting a 'most different systems' approach (Przeworski & Teune, 1970), we investigated how emerging mechanisms of conditionality, as a crucial part of broader social/public tenants' responsibilization strategies, operate in two different configurations of housing and welfare regimes. We focused on the Netherlands, a cross-over between conservative and socio-democratic regime with a high degree of state involvement in publicly subsidized housing provision (Hoekstra, 2003) and Italy, a conservative welfare regime incorporated to the Mediterranean cluster where publicly-provided housing represents a residual part of the stock (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Castles & Ferrera, 1996).

This paper aims to better understand how specific conditionality-based forms of governance are shaping housing professionals' promotion of greater tenants' responsabilization in different configurations of welfare and housing systems. The research question is: *how is the concept of conditionality, as a means to achieve greater tenants' responsabilisation, shaping recent approaches towards the allocation and management of social housing in Italy and in the Netherlands?* To address this question, we describe and compare two social/public housing projects in the cities of Utrecht (The Netherlands) and Milan (Italy), which are inhabited by a fine-grained mix of 'vulnerable' tenants, i.e. welfare dependents, and 'resourceful' social groups, mainly young people (students and workers). As part of the tenancy agreements, 'resourceful' tenants are expected to engage in solidarity activities to foster the social inclusion of their 'vulnerable' neighbours. We show that conditionality-based mechanisms are central elements of such tenancy agreements and operate in two different ways, i.e. *ex ante* and *ex post*. The first regulates the access of 'resourceful' tenants to the social housing project by assessing applicants' endowment with specific attitudes (high human and social capital) that envisage them as 'privileged receivers'. *Ex post* conditionality refers to the accountability of responsible and proactive conducts of such 'resourceful tenants' towards their 'vulnerable' neighbours. This study revealed that tenants and professionals have different priorities and expectations. For the tenants, the need of (affordable) housing is the *end*, while for the professionals, housing is the *means*, in tandem with tenants' resources, to achieve higher welfare state goals such as social cohesion and inclusion. This paper shows that such mismatch, coupled with the influence of contextual factors and challenges such as the state of maintenance of the built environment and legitimacy of institutional actors, contributes to explain different outcomes in terms of efficacy of conditionality as a means to achieve greater tenants' responsabilization.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a theoretical framework of the main traits of post-welfare states including a focus on the concepts of responsabilization and conditionality in social housing as well as on social mix and role modelling. Following this, a comparative framework discusses the link between welfare and housing systems in Italy and the Netherlands. The research design section discusses the methodology, including a description of case studies. We highlight and discuss our empirical findings before providing a discussion and conclusion, including general implications of our findings, in the last section.

Responsibilization of social housing tenants and conditionality in post welfare states

Across Western Europe, welfare states are increasingly relying on specific rationalities – labelled as 'positive welfare' (Giddens, 1998), 'enabling welfare' (Gilbert, 2002), 'new welfare' (Taylor-Gooby, 2008) – that link the access to services and benefits to the active and responsible behaviour of citizens (Flint, 2003; Giddens, 1994, 1998; Hoggett *et al.*, 2013; Peeters, 2013; Rose, 1999; Taylor-Gooby, 2002).

Responsibilization as a governmental strategy encourages citizens to do more for themselves, for their lives and for their communities, ultimately contributing to

broad policy ambitions (Malpass, 2008; Peeters, 2013). The idea of individuals as ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ emblematically describes the conditions of individuals constantly pushed to rely on personal efforts and to develop personal abilities to create one’s own means for consumption (Flint, 2006). With different labels, such as ‘governance at a distance’ (Rose, 2001), ‘meta-governance’ (Nederhand *et al.*, 2016), ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 2007), ‘ethopower’ (Rose, 2001), ‘ethical self-government’ (Cowan & Marsh, 2004), ‘contractual governance’ (Crawford, 2003), new governance strategies point to the need of shaping citizens’ conducts according to uncontested values, universal beliefs, and prescribed codes of living (Rose, 2001). To do so, new governance strategies operate through the construction or realignment of subjects’ identities (Flint, 2003), through the establishment of agreements to regulate social life, or by prescribing appropriate norms, values and behaviours, i.e. ‘citizenship agendas’, for particular subjects (Koster, 2015). Common to all these approaches is the turn to (contractual) communities as ‘the touchstone of good governance’. Community is conceptualized as both the social territory (e.g. the neighbourhood) and the mechanism through which subjects’ self-conduct is shaped (Cowan & Marsh, 2004; Flint, 2003).

Also in the social housing field, tenants are increasingly portrayed as autonomous, empowered and responsible individuals rather than passive welfare recipients (Flint, 2003). Within this particular context, three foci on the notion of responsibility will be studied in this paper: responsibility as agency, responsibility to community, and responsibility as self-regulation (Flint, 2004). These foci all assume responsibility beyond the maintenance of individual tenancy. The first focus (agency) envisages tenants as *empowered agents*, capable of contributing to the goals of the housing organization. To this scope, intensive regulatory roles and responsibilities for housing managers may be required to develop structures, framework and boundaries within which tenants exercise self-regulation serving housing agencies’ goal of governing *through* the conduct of their tenants. The second focus, *responsibility to community*, assumes a re-definition of tenants’ identities: from *consumers* with a focus on their rights, typical of the 1980s and early 1990s, to *citizens* with a focus on their duties and moral obligations deriving from being members of local communities. This shift implies a widening of responsibilities beyond the self-regulation of individual tenancies to include the self-regulation of their own behaviours in line with norms and values that are not detrimental to the communities they belong to. Similar to the previous case, specific roles are attributed to social housing agencies in developing strategies beyond their core tasks. In the third conceptualization of responsibility, as *self-regulation*, responsabilization means increasing tenants’ role in the wider processes of housing management, including stimulating the participation of other tenants (Priemus *et al.*, 1999). While fostering opportunities for tenant engagement is usually considered as desirable behavioural conduct (somewhat an *end* in itself), in the new governance of social housing promoting such opportunities is seen as a *means* to co-opt responsible tenants within wider governance structures and processes.

A conceptual distinction exists between attributing causal responsibility to one’s own action (*ex post* accountability) and designating responsibility as *ex-ante* virtue for the prevention or resolution of undesirable events (King, 2006; Peeters, 2013).

Some forms of social housing governance seem to emphasize the second interpretation of this concept. In a similar vein, such conceptual distinction stresses another differentiation between *obligations* within tenancy agreements (e.g. timely rent payments), and *desirability*, meaning a moral exhortation of tenants expressed through policy discourses or housing management techniques (Flint, 2004). Again, it seems that the latest politics of behaviour in housing seems to stress the latter over the former. While obligations and punitive measures undertaken by housing managers to sanction inappropriate behaviours have always existed within tenancy agreements, and continue to exist, rewarding mechanisms that incite tenants to assume positive conducts are increasingly assuming a central role within several forms of new governance in social housing.

Similar to responsibility, the notion of conditionality has affected several developments in welfare policy and housing over the last two decades, especially in the UK (Dwyer, 2004; Haworth & Manzi, 1999). Quoting Deacon (1994), Dwyer affirms that ‘a principle of conditionality holds that eligibility to certain basic, publicly provided, welfare entitlements should be dependent on an individual first agreeing to meet particular compulsory duties or patterns of behaviour’ (2004, p. 269). Following Deacon (2004), the theoretical justifications for conditionality in welfare fall into three main categories: contractualist, paternalistic, and mutualist. While *contractualist* positions claim that ‘it is reasonable to use welfare to enforce obligations where this is part of a broader contract between government and claimants’ (Deacon, 2004, p. 915), *paternalistic* positions view the exercise of authority, direction and surveillance on welfare dependents as essential, assuming that they lack of agency and self-control over their lives. The *mutualist* explanation for conditionality assumes that individuals hold commitments and responsibilities towards each other regardless from the claims they made upon governments. Mutualism differs from contractualism as it tends to emphasize duties to each other and responsibilities, which are not necessarily related to ‘a bargain between individuals and governments’ (Sacks, 1997). The main difference between contractualist and paternalist arguments is the reciprocity element (Deacon, 2004). While reciprocity is absent in the paternalist argument, in the contractualist argument beneficiaries (are expected to) meet certain requirements because they acknowledge that the government is also doing something for them.

Claims for greater tenants responsabilization are embedded in government and non-state actor strategies to tackle anti-social behaviours, such as nuisance, vandalism, and crime (Manzi, 2010). During the 1990s and early 2000s, social mix strategies on the neighbourhood level were implemented in several EU countries, often in the framework of urban renewal policies with predominantly physical measures, such as demolition and rebuilding (Costarelli *et al.*, 2019). These strategies attempted to discourage anti-social behaviours and provide more opportunities for social integration between socially diverse residents, in particular middle-class and low-income households. The ideal of mixed communities partly rests on the assumed positive role model function of higher-income households or homeowners for social housing tenants concerning attitudes towards their home, living environment, collective action, and employment status. The presumed underpinning mechanisms are distant or proximal role modelling. In distant role modelling, behavioural change occurs by

observing ‘proper’ behaviour from a distance. In proximal role modelling, changes derive from direct social interaction with another individual and the related transfer of ‘proper’ behaviour (Graves, 2011). The role model assumption as a justification for the mixed community policy is largely based on the neighbourhood effects theory first developed in the USA (Wilson, 1987) which has been subject to substantial critique (see e.g. Kleinhans, 2004).

Parallel to the ending of large scale, state-driven urban regeneration programmes in several Western EU countries, such as the Netherlands (Uyterlinde *et al.*, 2017), attempts to stimulate responsible self-conduct of social housing tenants are increasingly embedded in different frames. In both Italy and the Netherlands, several social housing organizations are implementing social mix at smaller spatial scales, i.e. single estates or blocks rather than at neighbourhood level. On this scale, interactions between socioeconomically diverse residents are regulated through social infrastructures designed by housing practitioners (Costarelli *et al.*, 2019). An example of such social infrastructure is the self-management of housing-related services implemented in a mixed housing project in Amsterdam, wherein Dutch tenants are made (more) responsible for supporting the process of social integration of status-holders (Costarelli *et al.*, 2020). In the UK, social landlords have introduced contractual-based mechanisms and arrangements regulating social housing tenures as to increase tenants’ responsabilization, to help tenants to meet their obligations and form positive relationships within the community, including tenant reward schemes, ‘sensitive letting policy’ (regulating access to housing on the basis of tenants’ potential contribution toward the community), or ‘letting committees’ where tenants and housing staff jointly seek to govern the conduct of others in the name of such communities (see Flint, 2003, 2004; Flint & Nixon, 2006; Hunter, 2001).

This paper is guided by the following research question: how is the concept of conditionality as a means to achieve greater tenants’ responsabilization shaping recent approaches to the allocation and management of social housing in Italy and in the Netherlands? The next section will briefly unpack the relationships between housing and welfare before diving into a description of the current configuration of such relationship in the two research contexts, Italy and the Netherlands.

Comparative framework

Comparative housing research used to rely on the classification of welfare regimes into social democratic, corporatist and liberal, operated by Esping Andersen in the 1990s (Malpass, 2008). In this classification, Italian and Dutch welfare systems have been defined as atypical situations in successive discussions (Arbaci, 2007; Borghi & van Berkel, 2007; Hoekstra, 2003). Italy, initially part of the conservative-corporatist model, has later been clustered into the Southern-European or Mediterranean model of welfare, while The Netherlands has been considered a cross-over between social-democratic and conservative models. These countries present different degrees of state involvement in publicly subsidized housing provision (social or public housing) as part of broader welfare arrangements (Malpass, 2008). In Italy, such involvement is notably residual, representing only 5% of the total housing stock, while in the

Netherlands the government exercises an indirect but consistent influence in the provision of social housing, which amounts to 30% of the total housing stock.

In their comparative paper, Borghi & van Berkel (2007) argued that Italy and the Netherlands experienced remarkable welfare state transformation processes over the last two decades, heading them towards an ‘active welfare state’ through similar principles of new governance: decentralization, empowering of municipalities, and increasing involvement of local non-state actors and civil society. Crucial differences include fragmentation and regional differentiation, lack of central regulation in Italy and dilemmas about too much or too little central government involvement in Dutch social policies (see also De Leonardis, 2011; Tonkens, 2011). In both countries, conditionality-based mechanisms have already been introduced in welfare policies and social benefits schemes against poverty and unemployment (D’Emilione, 2018; Leone, 2016; Veldboer *et al.*, 2015).

The presence of both similar principles of new governance and large differences in terms of contexts makes a comparison between the two countries very interesting. Therefore, we now provide a deeper description of the relationship between housing and new welfare state in each national context.

Italy

After the 1970s, welfare services provision in Italy was arranged through a ‘welfare mix’ model. Specific strategies to promote activation of recipients and participation in local governance were introduced based on the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity. The first relates to the downscaling towards the local levels of governance (decentralization), the second refers to the boosting of self-organization of civil society (De Leonardis, 2011). As an outcome of vertical subsidiarity, the ‘territorialization’ of welfare (Andreotti *et al.*, 2012; Bifulco, 2016) produced different regional welfare models across Italy. Duties, responsibilities and legislative autonomy in the field of housing and other social policies were transferred from the central State to Regions and Municipalities, despite a persisting strong centralization of economic resources. Horizontal subsidiarity brought about an increasing co-operation between public (state), private institutions (market) and civil society (including third sector actors such as foundations, voluntary associations, and cooperatives) concerning public services provision (Ferrera & Maino, 2012; Kazepov, 2008).

Post-crisis, austerity-driven reforms have exacerbated above mentioned trends, especially in terms of greater involvement of non-public providers (e.g. the third sector) and reliance on public-private partnerships to provide welfare services including housing (Costa & Sabatinelli, 2011). Within this context, a specific type of welfare mix model, known as ‘community welfare’, is emerging. Following Ponzo (2015), some of its main elements are:

1. the combination of different actors and logics (i.e. state, market, community, and households), who establish cooperative relationships with each other;
2. the shifting role of citizens: from consumers/users to providers/stakeholders of the organizations to whom they refer for specific public services;

3. the framing of local community as both producer and receiver of welfare services;
4. the high degree of reliance on resources provided by and available in each local context.

In this context, the Region Lombardy stood out as ‘the most extreme neo-liberal version of the re-organization of welfare’ (De Leonardis, 2011, p. 131). There, a growing number of community welfare practices and projects, run through partnerships between the Municipalities and/or Third Sector organizations (*in primis* foundations),² aim to promote the activation of citizens’ individual resources and turn them into collective assets for the community they live in, especially in disadvantaged public housing neighbourhoods. As we will argue in the research design section, several community welfare practices based on social mixing can be considered as a privileged arena to observe emerging governance rationalities aimed to increase tenants’ responsabilization through conditionality.

The Netherlands

Essential to the traditional Dutch welfare state is the feeling that ‘the strong’ had to care for ‘the weak’ (Brandsen *et al.*, 2011), which is also reflected in the Dutch expression for welfare state: *verzorgingsstaat* (caring state) (*ibidem*). Recently, the government has combined large budgetary cuts with crucial reforms in welfare and care provision, claiming that the welfare state is becoming too expensive to maintain, and thus requiring greater citizens’ involvement in the provision of care using their personal networks. This is achieved by constructing a shared responsibility and mutual interest among citizens to contribute to the ‘*res publica*’ as well as increasing solidarity with the community. Following Peeters (2013), responsabilization occurs ‘on government’s terms’, that is by nudging the people to behave according to the state’s view of the public interest,

for instance by connecting policy ambitions to presumed individual interests, by organising the opportunity structure in such a way that people are seemingly spontaneously directed towards desirable behaviour [...], or by proactively “reaching out” to citizens who are at risk of showing undesirable behaviour (p. 588).

In the white paper ‘Do-It-Yourself Democracy’, the Dutch government makes a case for supporting citizens-led initiatives dealing with societal issues (Kleinhans, 2017). Encouraging people to participate in society (known by the expression of ‘Participation Society’) has become a real *leit motiv*, which is cross-cutting different domains. Considering the long-term care and social assistance areas as examples, the government has emphasized citizens’ own responsibility towards their families, communities and their own well-being through the Social Support Acts 2007 and 2015. Citizens should take up active involvement by being keen to *voluntary* support people around them ‘to do things independently’, instead of relying on public support. Whenever possible, social care and support with daily activities should be provided at home, informally, without a professional framework. The provision of care takes the form of a social relationship, and goes ‘beyond the usual care among members of the

same household' (Dijkhoff, 2014, p. 287). In the housing domain, the latest government revision of the Housing Act (in 2015) introduced several limits to housing associations' freedom to develop non-landlord activities (NLAs), e.g. community development and urban regeneration to improve liveability and social cohesion in neighbourhoods, besides a stricter targeting of social rented dwellings to the most vulnerable households, including those who leave care institutions as a consequence of the above mentioned reforms to social welfare (Hoekstra, 2017). These reforms have to be seen as a step forward with respect to the development of an active welfare state, which dates back to the 1990s (see Borghi & van Berkel, 2007), and open questions regarding how housing associations will continue to develop socially oriented aims/activities in a context of their restricted tasks and room to move. The case study described in the next section will provide some interesting observations in this regard.

Research design

Comparative research can focus on different levels of housing reality, i.e. *outcomes*, *mechanisms* or *contexts*, along with distinct *territorial scales* (i.e. continents, regions, cities, suburbs, estates etc.) (Lawson *et al.*, 2010). This paper adopts a comparative approach to achieve a deeper understanding of the variations in the *mechanisms* of conditionality within tenants' responsabilization in two *contexts* characterized by different structural societal features, in our case coinciding with welfare and housing systems (Pickvance, 2001). Both in Italy and the Netherlands, city councils are assigned responsibilities in deciding how to implement national policies at the local level (decentralization) (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007; Brandsen *et al.*, 2011; Costa & Sabatinelli, 2011; Dijkhoff, 2014). To account for such multiple levels we adopted a three-stage procedure for case study selection.

In the first stage, we conceptualized conditionality and tenant responsabilization as examples of pivotal ideas within new welfare states (see theoretical framework) and looked at their (potential) variations within countries adopting a 'most different systems' approach (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Italy and the Netherlands were chosen in light of their differences in relation to welfare and housing systems (see previous section), which are indicative of different structural societal features (socio-economic stratification; legal and socio-political institutions; socio-cultural norms). As for Italy, we specifically focused to the Region Lombardy, where the re-organization of welfare was connoted by high levels of individual agency and strong promotion of responsible citizenship compared to the national context (De Leonardis, 2011). The selection of cities and practices (second and third stages) was based on a 'most similar systems' approach as we sought instances with most features in common linked to relevant structural societal factors (Pickvance, 2001). Utrecht and Milan were selected as in both cities the public/social housing sectors are extremely tight. This makes the competition to access affordable housing opportunities stronger while, at the same time, increasing the chances that local stakeholders will promote innovative practices to cope with the provision of housing.³ To select relevant practices as case studies, we carried out a number of explorative face-to-face interviews with key local informants

(i.e. policy-makers, professionals, researchers) coupled with desk research to sort out two or more housing projects satisfying the following conditions:

1. Being recently developed and implemented
2. Being embedded in the social/public housing sectors
3. Addressing similar target groups, including welfare dependents
4. Containing agreements in tenancy contracts to meet specific duties/behaviours (i.e. conditionality, see Dwyer 2004).

This led us to select the projects Majella Wonen in Utrecht and Ospitalità Solidale in Milan. These initiatives represent specific local-based practices within the social or public housing sector, which are not part of any national or municipality-wide policy yet. According to practitioners, these projects are experimental forms of social housing characterized by ‘trial and error’ approach. In the following subsection, we will discuss in detail the unique nature of such projects.

Description of case studies

The case studies examined in this paper, i.e. Majella Wonen in Utrecht ([Figure 1](#)) and Ospitalità Solidale in Milan ([Figure 2](#)), present some unique features when compared to traditional forms of social/public housing provision in the two national settings. In both projects, a unique allocation mechanism extends beyond the regular



Figure 1. Picture of Majella Wonen’s building, Utrecht. Source: Authors.



Figure 2. Picture of Ospitalità Solidale's building in Molise neighbourhood, Milan. Source: Authors.

allocation rules which primarily considers objective indicators of applicants' socio-economic status, i.e. income, to include subjective characteristics of applicants, such as personal attitudes, lifestyle, and individual preferences. Allocation is based on conditionality-mechanisms that aim to select a specific and 'desirable' profile of social tenants within the existing local housing demand. Another unique feature of these projects concerns the stronger emphasis on the community dimension. Compared to regular social/public housing provision, in both projects tenants are expected to actively engage in solidarity activities towards the members of the housing estates and neighbourhood community.

The Dutch project *Majella Wonen* is promoted by housing association *Portaal* and the social care organization *De Tussenvoorziening*. It consists in 70 units in one building which are equally allocated to self-selected 'resourceful' tenants (mainly young workers and students) and 'vulnerable' tenants (e.g. former homeless, people with mental disorders) who have left social care institutions as part of latest policy reforms. The aim is to create a supportive environment for facilitating a 'soft landing' of such vulnerable tenants. In return for housing at affordable rent (about 350 €/month), resourceful tenants engage to spend 16 hours per month in social activities. In the broader policy frame of 'Participation Society', wherein government exhorts citizens to volunteer in societal issues, resourceful tenants can be considered 'active citizens' sharing the responsibility for supporting vulnerable tenants' re-integration in society. Community building indeed represents a strategy deployed by housing associations to provide a supportive social infrastructure for vulnerable groups, thus fulfilling their social-oriented aims.

The Italian case study project, Ospitalità Solidale, is promoted by the housing cooperative DAR = CASA, the association Arci Milano, the social cooperative Comunità Progetto and the Municipality of Milan. Here, 24 housing units scattered across several blocks within two deprived public housing neighbourhoods are allocated to 'resourceful' young people who benefit from affordable rent (about 350 €/month) in return for a 10 hours per month commitment to volunteer in social activities with – and for – sitting public housing tenants, i.e. large households with an immigrant background, elderly (mainly single) people, and people with mental disorders. The aim of this project is to boost social cohesion by promoting social ties and solidarity relationships between tenants. The governance of this project reflects the welfare mix model discussed earlier in this paper, both in its vertical and horizontal subsidiarity framing as well as in its 'community welfare' meaning. The project is promoted and implemented locally through a partnership of multiple players: institutional actors (Municipality of Milan) and third-sector organizations (housing cooperative and associations). The project encompasses features of the 'community welfare' model wherein the role played by (active) citizens, in this case young tenants, is not merely of consumers of housing services, but rather also providers of welfare services for the local community which resourceful tenants become part of.

Methods and analysis

As part of a larger research project, from January 2017 to June 2018, 33 semi-structured interviews were carried out. We interviewed 24 housing professionals (12 in Italy and 12 in the Netherlands) and 9 tenants from the Dutch case study (see [Appendix 2](#)). Due to limited resources, it was not possible to involve tenants in the Italian case study, which represents an imbalance in the sampling. However, such imbalance does not represent an issue since the research aim of this study is to better understand how specific conditionality-based forms of governance are shaping housing professionals' promotion of greater tenants' responsabilization. The main – but not exclusive – focus is indeed on housing professionals' view rather than tenants. All respondents were reached through a snowball approach. The interviews were aimed at collecting information about aims, rationalities and outcomes of these projects, mainly from the perspective of housing professionals. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and integrated with personal notes from participant observation (held at the 'Garden Activity' and 'Spring party' in Majella in May 2017), informal meetings with project coordinators (during site visits) and content analysis of official reports, media coverage and survey for application to Ospitalità Solidale (see [Appendix 1](#)).

Through Atlas.ti we analyzed interview transcriptions using a deductive and iterative approach. We started from Dwyer's (2004) definition of conditionality to look for relevant compulsory duties and/or patterns of behaviours that tenants had to meet, and coded them as 'commitments', 'requirements' and 'expectations'. We focused on one single target group, i.e. the 'resourceful' tenants, as their tenancies are explicitly regulated by an underlying mechanism of conditionality. During this process, we also added codes, like 'motivation', based on the frequency with which our respondents mentioned it. Drawing on *ex ante* and *ex post* forms of responsibility

(King, 2006; Peeters, 2013), we accordingly subdivided the operating mechanisms of conditionality in two chronological steps: before and after project's start. We reframed these mechanisms as *ex ante* and *ex post* conditionality, each corresponding to a specific action, i.e. the selection of tenants and the accountability process, respectively.

Findings: unpacking conditionality

In this section, the mechanisms of conditionality are unfolded in two ways. First, as *ex ante* conditionality, referring to the process of, and underlying premises for, tenants' selection into the housing project. Second, as *ex post* conditionality, referring to the strategies adopted by professionals to account for tenants' efforts. At the core of both conceptualizations of conditionality is tenants' commitment to dedicate a fixed amount of time to social events/activities, e.g. gathering in convivial moments such as meals in little groups, participating in different activities in working groups such as gardening, recycle workshops etc. Activities usually result from tenants' suggestions and ideas based on their own skills, interests and resources, but can also derive from an in-depth exploration of needs in the wider neighbourhood, e.g. language classes for foreigners, childcare, free food distribution for low-income populations etc., as the Milan case shows.

Ex ante conditionality: the selection of resourceful tenants

The process of resourceful tenants' selection allows housing professionals to explore candidates' motivation, verify if they hold the necessary requirements to join the project, and make a preliminary assessment of resourceful tenants' potential future conduct (see Flint, 2003) and capacity to take up expected responsibilities. What makes candidates eligible for both projects is a combination of objective and subjective requirements, respectively candidates' socio-economic characteristics like age and income, and their social attitudes. In relation to the new welfare state rationalities, which encourage citizens to use personal efforts and abilities to become 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Flint, 2006), the subjective requirements are particularly important for our discussion. Candidates' personal attitudes are examined through questions like 'why [do] we need you in this project?', 'what are you going to do to have a positive influence for the neighbourhood?', 'what is the motivation that makes you interested in this project?' (Conversation with practitioner and Majella tenant, Interviews no. 13 and 23, Utrecht, April and June 2017) or 'what are the skills that you think you can share and make available to others?' (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018) 'For which types of social categories (e.g. elderly, children, youths) would your actions be most useful?' (Questions contained in the survey for application to Ospitalità Solidale, authors' translation). Respondents also reported that 'one should be ready to put him/herself into play. So [we] mostly look at the relational skills of the candidates [and] the interest in the project' (Practitioner, Interview no. 33, Milan, June 2018).

According to practitioners, desirable subjective requirements are those that highlight applicants' willingness to live side-by-side with more vulnerable people in a diverse housing environment. In our respondents' words: 'we created a website and put everything there so people can see: "I have to live there with homeless people" (...). If you don't want to live with them, you won't [sign] yourself up for a house' (Practitioner, Interview no. 22, Utrecht, June 2017). From a professionals' viewpoint, the desirable tenant profile holds 'some skills to connect with others, and others who are different from you because here you live with elderly, children ...' (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018).

From the tenants' point of view, a closer look at candidates' motivations allows shedding light on the reasons that pushed them to apply for the project. Besides the need of housing, which has unsurprisingly most commonly appeared in our content analysis, we found the search of a personal fulfilment and aspiration to do volunteering 'in [a] easier and more approachable way' (Tenant, Interview no. 27, Utrecht, June 2017) as the most relevant incentive.

First [motivation] is certainly the house, then it is the interest to do something and be helpful in a different way. Many guys told that they could have done volunteering with an association but they prefer instead to 'live it constantly' (...) something that you experience six months in a year or whatever your contract lasts and not an activity that you do in any volunteering association but anytime you like. It is something spontaneous and this is a motivation for today's young people. (Practitioner, Interview no. 33, Milan, June 2018)

For me it was actually an opportunity to do something good in your own neighbourhood, which you, in your normal life, maybe don't really have the time implemented for. You really get to the point that you really do like voluntary work or whatever [but] in this way it is very natural, it's in your own neighbourhood, you only have to knock the door on the other side of the staircase sometimes ... So that's why I decided. (Tenant, Interview no. 24, Utrecht, June 2017)

The presence of a condition (meeting the commitment), envisages a specific type of 'contractual communities' (Cowan & Marsh, 2004) where *expectations* and *requirements* come along with *needs* (Flint, 2015). In both projects, non-state actors, like housing associations and other third sector professionals, look for people with strong human and relational resources, who are supportive, cooperative, and open-minded. In this sense, they are *resourceful*, as these features are functional to the framing of a specific 'citizenship agenda' (Koster, 2015), which prescribes a clear role model to be played by resourceful tenants to the benefit of vulnerable inhabitants of the project or the neighbourhood. Role model mechanisms are typical of social mix strategies but the way role models are defined in the examined initiatives is different from its framing in most social mix literature (see Bolt *et al.*, 2010; Bond *et al.*, 2011; Kleinhans, 2004). Instead of middle class homeowners with relatively higher economic capital, role models in these projects are low-income youths with unstable housing and job conditions but with high socio-cultural and human capital who are willing to share it with their vulnerable neighbours (ex-homeless or sitting public housing tenants).

Put in this way, a distinctive form of social mix is promoted where residents' diversity is not framed as a dichotomous socio-economic and tenure differentiation (homeowners vs tenants; middle-class vs working-class; native vs immigrants). Our

respondents have explicitly mentioned skills and motivation denoting specific attitudes and lifestyles. In this light, we can link such differentiation to Tasan-Kok and colleagues' definition of hyper-diversity as an 'intense diversification of the population, not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities' (Tasan-Kok *et al.*, 2013, p. 12). Building on this definition, our case studies show that, for several individuals, hyper-diversity assets (preferences, attitudes, skills etc.) might be used to create one's own means for (housing) consumption (see Flint, 2006). Resourceful tenants may have greater chances to access such affordable housing opportunities by mobilizing some hyper-diversity assets as part of their becoming 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Flint, 2006). In our view, a starting point to understand better how personal features might turn into hyper-diversity assets is the candidates' housing career, more specifically the stage prior to entering the projects. As our case studies reported, most tenants had precarious living arrangements (temporary unsecure rental contracts, *anti-kraak* in Dutch), or were young adults still living in parental homes wishing to move in search of new job or study opportunity without possibility to afford it.

Ex-post conditionality: tenants' accountability

Accountability here refers to the evaluation process of tenants' commitment and how this relates to expectations underlying the project objectives. While in both cases accountability aims to increase tenants' self-awareness of their own efforts, housing professionals have implemented different accountability tools in the two case studies because Dutch tenants have shown a stronger community-oriented attitude than Italian peers. While Majella Wonen resembles a case of 'governing through community', Ospitalità Solidale envisages a case of 'realignment of governing roles and identities' (Flint, 2004). We will explain this in more detail.

In Majella Wonen, parallel to 'formal' meetings between professionals and tenants, 'informal' meetings are set out to allow all tenants talking in groups about participation to scheduled activities. Interviewed tenants emblematically defined them as 'evaluation talks' or 'a wake-up call' which function is to increase tenants' awareness about self-conduct and to nudge tenants to meet their obligations.

It's not like telling people that they are doing something wrong, but more keeping a mirror in front [of them], do you sincerely think that you are participating the way that you made a promise? And do you realize how fortunate you are to be able to be part of this group? Ultimately, it's like [a] self-reflection [of] what people are thinking: maybe I can do a little bit more. (Tenant, Interview no. 27 Utrecht, June 2017)

We talked indeed about motivation that has come from yourself and you have to motivate others. And you have to ask your neighbours: what's going on? How are you feeling? (*ibidem*)

Informal meetings as an additional act of governance is functional to reinforce existing norms (commitment) and increase social control through the network of peers (community). As practitioners argued, 'we put [the commitment] in a contract, but we cannot really control, [so] we created a network of people (...) who also check if someone is not doing so well or if someone is not doing enough for the

community' (Practitioner, Interview no. 22, Utrecht, June 2017). Community, intended as the network of peers, works as a means to keep tenants motivated and as a regulatory framework of behaviours (Flint, 2003).

What it should happen is that this environment will go into your DNA... You sign up for it, so you put an effort. That effort should be inserted in your normal way of life and, in that way, you can do the same for five or 10 years. That is something to happen, to make it natural, not forcing and therefore every neighbour [who] is not participating right now, has to be influenced in a positive way and notice [that] it is fun and good to have activities with your neighbours. It is good to be active in the garden. And they will come outside and are happy. (Tenant, Interview no. 28, Utrecht, June 2017)

In Majella, the evidence suggest that the mechanism of conditionality is framed within a broader strategy of responsabilization to community (i.e. the tenants of the housing project). According to such conceptualization, tenants' responsibility focuses on the duties and moral obligations, which originate from their membership to communities (see Flint, 2004). To be part of the Majella community entails specific prescriptions and regulations stated in the 'Majella Wonen household rules' (see [Appendix 1](#)), which all tenants of the project have to comply with. This framing of responsibility is explicitly connected to current policy discourses on the Participation Society and relatively recent configuration of welfare system (see Kleinhans, 2017; Peeters, 2013), revolving around the ideal of community. One tenant reported that: 'since 2015⁴ everything is changing and we are more focused on helping each other again and take care of your neighbourhood, your family' (Tenant, Interview no. 13, Utrecht, April 2017). According to others:

It's rather a development that we try as a society. Not only housing associations but the government and the social institutions too. If there is some possibility that people can live by themselves in the community, then that's a better way. It's a movement (...) trying to facilitate people who can, with some support, live in the society instead of putting them faraway in institutions. It's not new, but it's developing more and more in this direction. (Practitioner, Interview no. 23, Utrecht, June 2017)

In the Dutch case, tenants have clearly shown a strong desire and willingness to take up the tasks envisaged by practitioners. In our respondents' words: 'the tenants really want this. They want to live in a community (...), talk to each other, do things together, so they are in search of this' (Practitioner, Interview no. 23, Utrecht, June 2017).

Switching to the Italian case, Ospitalità Solidale, the 'realignment of governing roles and identities' is a consequence of the (unexpected) lack of tenants' self-regulation, which was the most desirable path according to housing practitioners. As one practitioner argued, the main shift was from 'an idea of self-responsibilization and self-organization to a more contractual [approach]' (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018), which required organizations to re-adapt their roles and ways of operating:

We [organisations] all expected a more spontaneous adhesion to the commitment (...). We wouldn't have played this role but it has been explicitly requested by tenants. So we combine normative-oriented messages such as "everybody has to come to the meeting" with a work on the individual motivation. Sometimes our role is simply to push tenants to follow up the activities they suggested which didn't have much participation (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018)

A more interventionist management approach consisted in introducing exceptional normative tools to account for tenants' efforts, such as the monthly self-registration of performed tasks in online-shared calendars reporting all scheduled activities. As one respondent reported, the objective is to help making one's contribution transparent to others (and tenants themselves) and to strengthen this message: 'whose burden is it? Is it my responsibility to control that you performed the activity or is it your responsibility to make time for it?' (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018). Another strategy adopted by practitioners was to appoint one contact person for each activity to be realized. He/she 'is the promoter of the initiative whom I use to contact to get a feedback about the activity ... to know if it went well or wrong, who was there ...' (Practitioner, Interview no. 33, Milan, June 2018). Last but not least, practitioners resorted to a reduction of tenancy length, from 2 to 1 year or even 6 or 3 months, which can be extended prior positive assessment. 'Previously we made 2-year contracts, now we make mainly 6 months contracts. In this way, every 6 months we have a meeting to evaluate the [individual] experience. Especially for less active tenants such extension works as an assessment' (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018).

As the rationale underpinning the Majella project was associated to the broader policy ambition to promote the Participation Society, likewise the rationale behind Ospitalità Solidale is in line with the 'community welfare' ideal. Our respondents defined Ospitalità Solidale as a community welfare project:

because it attempts to trigger something starting from citizens themselves (...) on the one hand this project aims to create some resources to bring in the territory, on the other hand, it does so in a participative way, by requiring the activation of inhabitants and citizens. The latter are not passive actors rather they can express, decide, take action themselves. (Practitioner, Interview no. 33, Milan, June 2018)

Within the broader frame of community welfare, the role of third sector organizations is to create the proper conditions for all beneficiaries to be empowered. Selected resourceful tenants are there to support organizations' mission, namely boosting social cohesion and solidarity ties within the targeted neighbourhoods, that was given by the local City Council. The use of conditionality principle in this community welfare project is then functional to sort out specific profiles of citizens that will be assigned additional responsibilities in relation to organizations' goal. In this sense, responsabilization can be conceptualized as agency, stressing tenants' capacity to contribute to the aim of housing organization (Flint, 2004) and, indirectly, government's aims. The lack of tenants' self-agency complicated this picture, suggesting that conditionality as a central component of responsabilization strategies within a community welfare approach brings about new challenges and possible drawbacks. We will discuss some of these challenges in the next subsection.

Tenants' responsabilization through conditionality: making sense of contextual factors and challenges

Recalling the different levels of housing reality, i.e. *outcomes, mechanisms, contexts* and *territorial scales* (Lawson *et al.*, 2010), we now discuss our research findings in a comparative perspective. Despite similar premises in terms of conditionality (i.e. the

mechanism), the two projects have unfolded differently in terms of increasing tenants' responsabilization (*outcomes*). Dutch tenants have apparently showed a stronger community-oriented vision of their expected conduct (Flint, 2003) than their Italian peers, which facilitated their undertaking of greater responsabilization. An Italian practitioner said she:

hoped that they would have easily become a group that was able to do full-planning [but], after the kick-off phase, [we] realized that this was not a group (...) it was more complicated because the reasons that aggregate people were a bit fuzzy: there was a *strong* need of housing and a *general* attitude to realise activities for a neighbourhood that was unknown to everyone, including us (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018).

The point raised by practitioners seems to concern the process of consolidation of the tenants as a cohesive group around a shared goal, as well as the imbalance between two key elements of the project: *needs* (housing) and *requirements* (commitment) (see Flint, 2015), in favour of the former.

A potential explanation of such diverging *outcome* could be related to the *territorial scale* at which the projects are realized (i.e. estates and neighbourhood). In fact, the territorial boundaries define the mixed community, i.e. the *locus* of community, which in turn determine the span of project activities promoted by resourceful tenants in the frame of conditionality.

A more sophisticated interpretation of the different outcomes between the two cases lies in the different social mixing strategies. While in Majella resourceful and vulnerable tenants are mixed at door-to-door level, in Ospitalità Solidale practitioners adopted a scattered social mixing approach: 'filling' empty dwellings in neighbourhoods' estates depending on their availability rather than a precise allocation strategy that tries to maximize proximity between different target groups, as it intentionally occurred in Majella. In line with the social mixing strategies adopted, Dutch practitioners tend to stimulate social contacts and activities at the estate level (though not limited to this level), while Italian practitioners 'do not tie to a single estate, but try to do something for the entire neighbourhood (...). There are one-to-one relationships in the building but most activities are neighbourhood-oriented (...) to do something more for it ... in that sense the community' (Practitioner, Interview no. 33, Milan, June 2018). For Dutch practitioners 'the emphasis is first getting your community [referring to Majella Wonen tenants] right (...), [as] you get that working well (...) you know how to educate the people around them [the neighborhood]' (Practitioner, Interview no. 22, Utrecht, June 2017).

While the different *locus* of mixed community is one of the contextual factors influencing social interaction opportunities between resourceful and vulnerable tenants, we have detected a further challenge that complicated the fulfilment of project aims in the Italian case study. This concerns the problematic social and physical environment of the neighbourhoods. As argued by an Italian practitioner:

When we arrived here, we found part of the population, the elderly, feeling a state of abandonment by the institutions, with legitimate needs regarding the management of the built environment (fixing intercoms, pavements etc.) (...) They told us: "What should you be doing?" Are you from the Municipality? What are you going to propose us if here everything is abandoned? (Practitioner, Interview no. 32, Milan, June 2018)

While issues such as the state of physical maintenance of social/public dwellings and legitimacy of local institutions have not emerged as issues in our interviews with Dutch respondents, we can assume that these elements contributed to explain the divergent outcomes and functioning of conditionality in the two case studies. These elements involve the concept of reciprocity as a key element in contractualist forms of welfare conditionality (see theoretical framework). In such a ‘bargain’, citizens, state and non-state actors all have specific duties to each other. If one of the parties does not meet the expectations, the outcome might be disparate. In Dwyer’s words: ‘people are essentially “Homo reciprocans” (i.e. co-operative beings willing to accept that it is legitimate that they be asked to make certain contributions, provided others do likewise)’ (2004, p. 278).

Discussion and conclusions

This paper comparatively examined how conditionality-based mechanisms were used to increase tenants’ responsabilization in small-scale social/public housing projects, namely Ospitalità Solidale in Milan (Italy) and Majella Wonen in Utrecht (The Netherlands). These projects are characterized by a fine-grained mix between young people (students or workers), called ‘resourceful tenants’, and socially disadvantaged people (welfare dependents and sitting public housing tenants), called ‘vulnerable tenants’. The paper particularly revealed how the concepts of conditionality and responsabilization are mutually linked: the first has been introduced as part of the mechanisms regulating both allocation and management of tenancies with the ultimate goal of increasing tenants’ responsabilization.

The paper moves beyond the evidence base of UK-based studies, which largely dominate this strand of literature (Flint, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2015; Flint & Nixon, 2006; Haworth & Manzi, 1999; King, 2006; Manzi, 2010) to include Italy and the Netherlands. Despite limitations regarding the ‘outsider’ nature of examined projects, meaning that they cannot be representative of the whole social/public housing systems, we found explicit connections between the promotion of such governance principles and the latest developments of welfare discourses at national level, i.e. the Participation Society in the Netherlands, and regional-level, i.e. community welfare in the Italian case.

In both cases, increasing tenants’ responsabilization through conditionality belongs to specific citizenship agendas (Koster, 2015) promoted by state and non-state actors (either housing associations or third sector organizations), which are centred around a peculiar form of social mix strategy. In this strategy, a ‘positive role model’ is played by tenants endowing the *ability* and *willingness* to mobilize personal resources (skills, attitudes) for the benefit of specific subgroups of (vulnerable) neighbours, as a precondition to be eligible for joining the project. Playing a role model also means undertaking specific obligations (e.g. organizing and participating in social activities), which derive from conditionality.

This paper contributes by introducing the idea of ‘privileged receivers’ of social housing, referring to a pool of young candidates rich in human and social capital who are allowed to access affordable housing earlier than other active house seekers. Access to examined social housing projects is based on the assessment of tenants’ personal attitudes (*ex ante* conditionality) while the maintenance of the social

dwelling depends on tenants' compliance with undertaken obligations to commit in supportive actions. The accountability of tenants efforts (*ex post* conditionality) indicates the extent to which resourceful tenants do – or do not – make their human and social capital available to the rest of the housing community. This means that the inclusion of 'suitable' and 'active' tenants involves the exclusion of other housing seekers with a similar, or potentially more urgent, housing need, but lacking of necessary requirements and willingness to participate in social activities. In this sense, the conditionality-based approach in these projects does not reflect universalistic principles upon which several housing and welfare systems used to be based on, especially in the Netherlands. A shift in welfare state paradigm, from need-based benefits to welfare conditionality, is likely to have major implications in terms of social justice – which is defined here as the distribution of benefits and burdens in society (Elster, 1992). Being bounded to individuals' own personality and requirements of self-activation, this kind of social housing provision prioritizes subjective characteristics over objective assessments of individuals' needs, resulting in less universal and equal opportunities, as well as being highly dependent on practitioners' discretionary power in deciding on whom to allocate the dwellings to.

Connected to the idea of 'privileged receivers', i.e. applicants' endowing high human and social capital, is the risk of exacerbating inequalities along new lines, i.e. 'resourcefulness'. The latter represents an asset that can make the difference in easing or hampering young applicants' chances to access scarce social housing opportunities. Future research could shed more light on the making of relational and human capital needed to access these social housing initiatives. Understanding how young people were able to develop those social attitudes that allowed them to benefit from examined social housing opportunities would be helpful to shed more light on the roles played by both public and private institutions, e.g. schools, community centres, volunteering associations, in distributing crucial opportunities to form such capital, thus explaining such patterns of inequality along resourcefulness.

Concerning the accountability of tenants' efforts, with respect to other responsabilization strategies (see Flint, 2002, 2003, 2004) more pressing and binding demands are made on tenants who have to combine housing as the site of public engagement and as their own private space (*home*). Organizations exploit tenants' resources and energies by assigning them additional responsibilities beyond basic dwelling maintenance to sustain the social infrastructure of these projects. In this sense, future research could address the accountability of tenants' efforts by assessing whether an excessive pressure on tenants as the new welfare state agents potentially risks resulting in a burnout of people's energies and resources that are necessary to sustain the projects on the long-term. Paradoxical effects could also originate from the benchmark used to account for tenants' efforts, i.e. 10 and 16 hours per month, which might offer a misleading portrayal since the time spent on one activity is not necessary commensurate to the social value or impact of such activity. Although conditionality helps to greater circumscribing of individual conduct, it also becomes a source of ambiguities in relation to the accountability of tenant participation (Flint, 2004). In our cases, tensions might arise from tenants' attributing different values to performed activities and engagement exactly because of fuzzy benchmarks, possibly resulting in

disappointment towards fellow neighbours. In this sense, the element of reciprocity, which characterizes the contractual claim of conditionality, should be considered from two perspectives: between individuals and governments (Deacon, 2004; Dwyer, 2004), but also between individuals themselves, in our cases tenants. While this paper has mainly focused on accountability as the evaluation process of tenants' efforts in relation to professionals' expectations and tools, future research could focus on the perceptions and opinions of tenants regarding the commitment and efforts made by the other resourceful tenants within the housing project. This would be important to understand whether the use of fuzzy benchmarks to mark out individual participation is likely to spread a feeling of 'perceived unfairness' among the most active members of the housing project.

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Notes

1. As an example, since the introduction of the 'Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act' in 1998, public housing authorities in the United States require residents who are not exempt to perform eight hours of community service activities per month or participate in a self-sufficiency program for at least eight hours every month.

2. As an example, we can cite here the ‘Community Welfare and Social Innovation’ (Authors’ translation) programme, launched by Fondazione Cariplo that is one of the main foundations in Lombardy involved in the welfare service provision as part of the local ‘welfare mix’ model in the Region. This programme aims to promote innovative welfare practices based on citizens’ participation, and appealing to a communitarian dimension by targeting specific subgroups and territories.
3. As an example, in Utrecht applicants for social housing dwellings can wait up to 7 years until they get an accommodation. In Milan, the city which holds the largest public housing stock (around 10% compared to 5% at national level), more than 20,000 applicants are on the waiting lists.
4. Here the respondent is in all likelihood referring to the set of welfare reforms issued in 2015, that includes the Social Support Act but also the Housing Act.

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Appendix 1: List of relevant material consulted

Media coverage

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- Survey for candidates to Ospitalità Solidale. Available at <http://www.arcimilano.it/ospitalita-solidale/> (accessed 6 August 2018).
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Appendix 2: List of respondents

Interview number	Role of interviewees	Organization/project	City	Country	Period of interview
1	Director	ALER Milano (Public housing company)	Milan	Italy	January 2017
2	Director	Fondazione Housing Sociale			
3	Project coordinator	La Cordata			
4	Vice-President	DAR = CASA			
5	Project coordinator				
6	Project manager	Platform 31	The Hague	The Netherlands	February 2017
7	Policy maker	Housing Department – City Council Milan	Milan	Italy	March 2017
8	Civil servant	Housing department – City Council Milan			
9	Project manager	Platform 31	The Hague	The Netherlands	
10	Consultant	Portaal (housing association)	Utrecht		April 2017
11	Advisor				
12	Independent researcher	N.A.			
13	Tenant	Majella Wonen			
14	Project coordinator	Socius Wonen			May 2017
15	Social worker	Stichting De Tussenvoorziening			
16	Policy officer representative	Aedes – Federation of Dutch social housing associations	The Hague		
17	Director	Department of welfare and social housing – Region Lombardy	Milan	Italy	
18	Tenants	Majella Wonen	Utrecht	The Netherlands	
19					
20					
21	Senior policy officer and advocate	Woonbond (Dutch tenant union)	Amsterdam		June 2017
22	Social manager (<i>sociaal beheerder</i>)	Portaal	Utrecht		
23	Advisor	Portaal			
24	Tenants	Majella Wonen			
25					
26					
27					
28					
29	Project Manager	City Council Utrecht			September 2017
30	Project coordinator	DAR = CASA	Milan	Italy	November 2017
31	Project Assistant	Comunità Progetto			June 2018
32	Project Manager				
33	Project Assistant	Arci Milano			