QUALITY OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE NETHERLANDS AND ENGLAND

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The Netherlands and England both have a large social housing stock. At first sight the quality backlog of an average public sector dwelling in the Netherlands and England seems to be similar. However the way quality backlog is defined and measured in the Netherlands (all backlog) and in England (backlog above fixed levels) differs. Within England there is a pronounced difference in quality between the social housing stock of local authorities and housing associations. The reasons for the difference in quality backlog are related to the age of the stock and differences at the sector level. Housing associations in the Netherlands are private companies who have a strong desire to develop businesslike approaches. They are also confronted with less regulation. Whilst English housing associations resemble the Dutch social sector, they tend to be smaller in size and as such lack the power to develop businesslike approaches. They also have to deal with more regulations and supervision requirements. Local authorities in England are still in public hands.

Keywords: building regulation, maintenance, social housing, quality, investment

INTRODUCTION

Thirty-five percent (Netherlands) and nineteen percent (England) of the housing stock is managed by social landlords. This paper focuses on the quality of the social housing stock in the two countries. The difficulties in comparing quality concepts between the Netherlands and England are being addressed. Other factors, including differences in social housing sector level and stock characteristics and the quality policies pursued by government (including measurement methods of quality) in both countries will also be considered. This paper should be seen as a first analysis of the relations between the factors mentioned above. The following subjects are addressed in this paper: the characteristics of the social housing; the legal position of social landlords, quality regulations and the quality of social housing in the Netherlands and England. We end the paper with our preliminary conclusions, along with an outline for future research.

THE SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

The social rented housing stock in the Netherlands consists of 2.4 million dwellings and is almost entirely in the hands of housing associations. The social housing stock accounts for 35% of the total housing stock in the Netherlands. There is also a small private rented sector (12%). A little over half the stock is owner-occupied (see Table 1). The proportion of social housing is reasonably stable, but is decreasing slightly,
partly as a result of housing association sales programmes. In addition, most new building is for owner-occupied housing.

Until recently, the municipalities also managed part of the social housing sector. The housing associations were privatized in the mid 1990s and the municipalities were given a supervisory role. To avoid potential conflicts of interest (i.e. management and supervision), it was then decided to phase out the municipalities' management role. The property of municipal housing departments was gradually transferred to housing associations. Currently, 540 Dutch housing associations manage an average of 4,440 homes (Vijverberg 2004). Approximately 10% of the management organizations manage over 10,000 homes.

**Table 1:** Division of housing stock by tenure in the Netherlands and England (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of housing stock</th>
<th>Social rented</th>
<th>Private rented</th>
<th>Owner-occupied</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


England has 4.0 million social rented dwellings, which amounts to 19% of the total housing stock of 21.5 million homes. As in the Netherlands, the private rented sector is small (10%), and more than 70% of the stock is owner-occupied. Sixty percent of social housing in 2003 was in local authority hands (i.e. public housing companies), the other forty percent was owned by housing associations (National Statistics 2004a/b). Although most of the housing associations are voluntary not-for-profit organizations, they operate under close government regulation and are registered as social landlords (RSL’s).

**Table 2:** Characteristics of social landlords in the Netherlands and England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Netherlands Housing associations</th>
<th>England Local authorities</th>
<th>RSLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of dwellings</td>
<td>2.4 million</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
<td>1.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of landlords</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings per landlord</td>
<td>4,440</td>
<td>10,370</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Local authority ownership in England is being scaled down sharply. In 1979, they managed 5.1 million of the 5.5 million social homes (Thomas and Gruis 2004). Between 1980 and 1990, the total social housing numbers fell to 4.4 million, most importantly because of the sale of 200,000 homes to tenants. Social housing numbers dropped further in 2003 to 4.1 million. Between 1999-2004 local authorities sold a total of 765,000 dwellings. Almost two thirds of that total (61%) was transferred to RSL’s. The other dwellings were sold as part of the right-to-buy-program to sitting tenants (National Statistics 2004b).

In 2003 local authorities managed 2.5 million homes and RSL’s 1.6 million (National Statistics, 2004b). Local authority companies are large management organizations that manage on average more than 10,000 homes. RSL’s are considerably smaller, managing on average less than 1,000 homes. A little more than seven percent of housing associations own approximately eighty percent of all dwellings in the social rented sector. The RSL sector is very diverse. There is a wide range of quite different organizations, varying from ancient almshouses trusts and Victorian charitable foundations to self-build co-ops and former local authority housing departments (Thomas and Gruis 2004). Whilst some were founded centuries ago, many trace their
origins to the 1960s and over the last decade, new associations have been formed to manage and develop dwellings transferred to them by local authorities (large scale voluntary transfers). These transfers of ownership have also contributed to the growth (in size) of the average housing association.

Table 3: Characteristics of social housing stock in the Netherlands and England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Netherlands Housing associations</th>
<th>England Local authorities</th>
<th>RSLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typology houses-flats</td>
<td>70%-30%</td>
<td>67%-33%</td>
<td>60%-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings in flats &gt;4 floors</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age profile stock:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1945</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1945</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-'69: 36%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1945-'65: 42%</td>
<td>1945-'65: 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useable floor area houses-flats</td>
<td>90-68 m²</td>
<td>93-59 m² (total stock)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


LEGAL POSITION

Dutch housing associations are not-for-profit organizations, which are obliged to operate in the interest of housing, in particular by providing decent, affordable housing to lower-income households. This is reflected in the Housing Act and the Social Rented Sector Management Decree (BBSH), which states the rights and obligations of Dutch housing associations (Priemus 2003). The BBSH defines six main tasks to which the social housing organisations must direct their efforts. These are: to assure good quality; to guarantee financial continuity; to rent on a priority basis to special attention groups; to involve tenants in the management of the organisation, to make a contribution to the quality of life in neighbourhoods and to housing of persons in need of care or supervision. At the end of each year, the social housing organisations must indicate in their annual reports what they have achieved in these performance areas. These achievements must be justified to the local and central government.

In the 1990s, the national government granted social landlords considerably greater freedom of policy, but also diminished the financial support to social landlords. Furthermore, demand for social housing decreased, partly because of a booming economy and changes in housing preferences towards home ownership. As a consequence, housing associations in the Netherlands began to adopt businesslike approaches in their housing management. They had to operate in a more market-driven and client-driven way. Strategic housing stock policy is generally accepted within large social housing associations in the Netherlands. In a housing stock policy document, a housing association constructs a picture of the composition of the desirable dwelling portfolio and sets up market and stock strategies (Vijverberg 2004) to achieve it’s portfolio.

Aedes is the national umbrella organisation of the Dutch housing associations. Almost every housing association is member. Their main goal is to promote the interests of the social landlords and the social housing sector on all possible fronts. Aedes is a network organisation, works on research and product development and provides information and education for its members. It is also the employer's organisation for the people working in the Dutch social housing sector. Aedes however has not the same statutory position as the English Housing Corporation (see below).
In England, local authorities and housing associations operate within different statutory, regulatory and funding frameworks. They started independently and developed along different legislative paths. Nevertheless, both parts of the social rented sector have some key similarities. The stock has been provided through public subsidy and is subject to regulation (e.g., the Housing Act, the Housing Association Act and the Landlord and Tenant Act). Rents are set below market levels. Like the Netherlands, both local authorities and housing associations are under pressure to develop businesslike approaches towards housing management (Thomas and Gruis 2004). From 2001/02 the introduction of business plans is part of the process of encouraging authorities to make better use of their housing assets. These business plans draw on an investment plan informed by stock condition surveys. The recent government agenda for social housing policy was set by the Housing Green Paper (DETR 2000). The agenda for the future emphasizes a more strategic role for local authorities and the need to prepare housing strategy statements that are tuned to regional and national agendas and objectives. Local authorities and housing associations are responsible for their own investments and the maintenance of their stock. In contrast to housing associations, local authority investment continues to be eligible for central government support.

Most housing associations are registered with the Housing Corporation (HC). The HC was set up in 1964 and has a statutory responsibility for investing public money in housing associations and ensuring they provide decent homes and services for residents. The HC introduced formal ‘inspection’ for all registered social landlords in 2002. In 2003 the Audit Commission took over the inspections from the HC (Housing Corporation 2004). The inspections cover six housing association duties, including maintenance and investment. The basic framework and approach to inspection stayed the same. Housing associations are subject to the HC’s Regulatory Code, which requires RSL’s to operate viable businesses with adequate resources to meet current and future business and financial commitments. All business plans are assessed by the Housing Corporation to check compliance with regulatory requirements. RSL’s must fund all their maintenance and investment plans from their own resources and must operate a clear asset management strategy and develop clear plans for bringing the housing stock into compliance with the Decent home standard by 2010 (see next section).

Many housing associations are also associated with the National Housing Federation, which represents 1,400 housing associations in England. The Federation is the English counterpart of Aedes. It is funded by membership fees and commercial services. The Federation aims to be the representative of the (united) social housing sector and the negotiator for the strategic interests of the sector.

**QUALITY REGULATIONS**

Both England and The Netherlands have various instruments that regulate the quality of existing dwellings. The most important are:

- Building Regulations that set minimum quality standards.
- Enforcement options for local authorities when health and safety is threatened.
- Legal repair duties of landlords.

Besides these regulations England has set a minimal quality level in the Decent home standard. The Netherlands do not have such regulatory quality instrument. This section gives (a brief) overview of these quality regulations.
Building regulations
Both in England and the Netherlands existing buildings are subject to the building regulations in the case of major alterations. The Dutch Building Decree contains performance based requirements for newly built and existing buildings. Housing Associations have to comply with the requirements when they carry out major repair and renovation activities. In principle they have to meet the requirements for new buildings. However it is possible that the local authority grants exemptions for certain requirements. This is for instance the case if it is impossible to meet certain demands or if the costs to realize the demanded solution are out of all proportion. In England existing buildings are subject to the Building Regulations in the case of material alterations or certain changes of use (e.g. an office building is converted in apartments). The regulations specify which requirements should be applied in which case. Just as in The Netherlands local authorities in England have the power to dispense with or relax any requirement contained in the regulations within certain limits.

Enforcement
In the Netherlands local authorities can undertake action when the quality level falls below a level where the safety and wellbeing of occupants or other people is endangered. This power to act is based on the Housing Act and Building Decree. Usually the local authority summons the owner to take the necessary action to repair the shortcomings. English local authorities have comparable statutory enforcement powers based on the Building Act and Housing Act. The current Housing Act contains the housing fitness standard. A dwelling is unfit if it fails to meet one or more of the requirements set out in the fitness standard and by reason of that failure is not reasonably suitable for occupation. As we will see below the fitness standard is one of the four criteria to determine if a home is decent. In the immediate future the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) will replace the housing fitness regime.

Besides this building related legislation, public health law has also provided protection for tenants against some of the effects of poor quality housing conditions. In England it is also possible to undertake actions on basis of the Environmental Protection Act.

Legal repair duty landlords
The Tenants (and other) Acts in both countries places legal duties on landlords to safeguard the (minimum) quality of dwelling on landlords. Tenants can force the landlord to carry out certain maintenance and repair actions. Landlords have the obligation to keep the structure, exterior and installations of a dwelling in repair and in good order. The Dutch Rent Regulation enumerates – in the Defects Decree - an elaborate list of defects which could lead to rent reduction. A distinction is made between A (very serious), B (serious) and C (other) defects and shortcomings.

In England a landlord has also the duty to take reasonable care to ensure that anyone whom might reasonably expected to be affected by defects in the state of the premises is reasonably safe from injury or damage to their property caused by a relevant defect of which the landlord knew or ought to have known (Defective Premises Act).

Decent Home Standard England
In 2000 the English government set itself a Public Service Agreement target of bringing all social housing up to the Decent home standard (DHS) by 2010. In 2002 this target was broadened to encompass also seventy percent of dwellings in the private sector occupied by vulnerable households (ODPM 2004). The DHS is a temporary quality instrument, which sets a minimal quality level. The quality elements measured in de DHS correspond to a large extent with the defects mentioned
in the Dutch Defects Decree (see above). The DHS distinguishes four assessment criteria:

- The minimum fitness standard, which states that there must be no serious defects, that the home is structurally safe and healthy, that facilities are present for heating, lighting and ventilation, and that the home has tap water, sewers, a WC and a bath or shower and cooking facilities.
- The repair criterion. Twelve essential and three ordinary building components are distinguished. Building components refer to the constructional, shell and internal building elements. The assessment is made on the basis of the age and the state of a building element.
- The modern facilities criterion. A home is assessed on six facilities (e.g. kitchen, bathroom and sound insulation), primarily on age, area, etc.
- The thermal comfort criterion. A home must have both efficient heating and effective insulation.

To tackle the quality problems much of the hope of the government is placed on the RSL’s. Although it is possible that local authorities can improve the non-decent homes themselves, the alternatives offered to them will lead to a (further) decline of the council housing stock. The main options available to local authorities (or stock investment option are):

- Setting up an Arms Length Management Organization (ALMO), in which the municipality sets up a sort of private company to manage and repair the homes.
- Joining a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) where the municipality continues to own the homes, but the private sector takes care of the administration and management.
- Transfers of ownership to a housing association (RSL), which then repairs the property (364,000 dwellings were transferred in the 1996-2001 period).

Between 1997 and 2004 138 council stocks were transferred, 36 ALMOs were founded and 16 PFI contracts were established (Housing Corporation, 2004).

The Decent home policy is not accepted without question by the English Parliament. In a report of the Select Committee on ODPM several problems have being addressed (Select Committee 2004). The Select Committee believes that the standard is set too low and that the government uses the policy to minimise the proportion of council housing. The government however adheres to its policy. They consider the standard as a threshold that triggers action to improve homes, rather than a standard to which work should be carried out. Furthermore the government believes, with regard to the role of local authorities, that separation of stock management and strategic management of housing will have advantages of all parties involved (Deputy Prime Minister 2004). As stated before in The Netherlands the move to phase out the municipalities’ management role was made in the early nineties. In this paper we will not elaborate on the (political) (dis)advantages of the DHS. We use it to describe the quality of social housing.

QUALITY OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE NETHERLANDS

The physical quality of the Dutch housing stock and living environment was measured periodically (i.e. every five to six years) in a Qualitative Housing Survey (KWR). The last comprehensive investigation was carried out in 2000. The KWR focuses on the structural state of the building, the functional quality, energy-saving measures, security facilities and the spatial quality of the living environment. In 2005 the nationwide surveys have been combined in one research structure (WoON) which contains several modules which are being carried out in various cycles. The module
‘Repair and Maintenance of Dwellings’ makes an inventory (via an enquiry of occupants) as to what extent repair and maintenance jobs are being carried out. The first enquiry will be held in 2007 and will recur every 3 years. The module ‘Building inspections of dwellings’ (by professional inspectors) to determine the technical condition of dwellings will be carried out every 9 years, starting in 2009.

The structural quality in the KWR is expressed in the necessary repair costs to remedy overdue maintenance and defects. The average repair costs for the entire Dutch stock fell between 1990 and 2000 by 40%, from €4,200 to €2,500 per dwelling. For the total stock, this equates to a fall from €24.3 to €16.4 billion. The quality improvement arises largely from improvements to the prewar stock, which was the group of homes that the urban renewal of the 1980s and 1990s focused on. The Dutch social rented housing stock is in good structural condition. The average repair costs are €1,450 per dwelling (see Table 4).

Exterior frames, roofs, sheds or garages, external walls and ceilings are the most important repair items, accounting for two-thirds of repair costs. The other structural and installation elements are responsible for the remaining repair costs.

Functional quality is an important indicator of usable area. The average usable area of the Dutch housing stock is 104 m² (single-family dwelling: 118 m² and multi-family dwelling: 72 m²). Social housing is considerably smaller than the average, with a typical single-family dwelling being about 90 m² and a multi-family home 68 m². The level of facilities in dwellings increased sharply in the 1990-2000 period, and the same applies to internal and external accessibility. For internal accessibility, the living room, kitchen, sanitary facilities and at least one bedroom are situated on one floor. Almost 50% of the social housing stock satisfies this criterion (compared with 37% of the total stock). For the social housing stock, the figure is almost 50%. For external accessibility, the home must be accessible from outside without needing to climb stairs. Three quarters of the Dutch housing stock is completely accessible, which is mainly because of an increase in the number of multi-family dwellings with a lift. Housing associations have installed a relatively large number of lifts in their early post-war stock.

**Table 4: Quality of the social housing stock in the Netherlands (2000) and England (2001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality aspects</th>
<th>Netherlands Housing associations</th>
<th>England Local authorities</th>
<th>RSLs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural repair costs (per dwelling)</td>
<td>€1,450</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs to make decent (per dwelling)²</td>
<td>€2,420</td>
<td>€1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central heating</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double glazing</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall insulation</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor insulation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The energy quality of the housing stock is an important topic. One of the most important energy-saving measures is insulating the shell of the home. Progress is being made. Between 1995-2000 the proportion of homes with double glazing rose from 57% to 69%, with wall insulation from 42% to 50%, with roof insulation from 51% to 63% and the with floor insulation from 24% to 34%. The social housing stock, has performed several percentage points better than the average for wall insulation,

² The figures mentioned are the average (2001) for all LA and RSL dwellings. LA: 2.79 million dwellings, 43% is non-decent, costs to make decent: €5,619 per dwelling. RSL: 1.388 million, 28% is non-decent; costs to make decent: €5,344 per dwelling (exchange rate £1 to €1.47).
approximately equal to the average for double glazing, and a few percentage points below average for floor insulation and roof insulation (see Table 4). Eighty four percent of space heating in the social rented sector is provided by an individual central heating installation.

QUALITY IN ENGLAND

The quality of the UK housing stock is measured in the English Housing Condition Surveys. Like the KWR, the measurements are made periodically. From 2002 on the survey will be carried out on an annual basis (ODPM 2003). The EHCS measures – amongst other things - the developments in connection with the DHS and calculates the costs to make dwellings decent. The EHCS also calculates the (average) repair costs and the required expenditure. Quality backlog is defined more broadly in the English House Condition Survey than in the Dutch KWR. Roughly we could relate the definitions as follows. In the Netherlands, reliable backlog data is available only on the basis of structural quality, while in the UK the Decent home standard also incorporates housing quality in a broader sense (e.g. functional quality and energy) alongside technical quality.

Table 5 shows that for the total stock, nearly one third of the homes were non-decent in 2003, compared to 45% in 1996. The housing stock owned by RSLs’ is in relatively good condition. Council housing still lacks behind. Nonetheless there has been a considerable improvement in quality. This improvement can partly be explained by the construction of new reasonably high quality homes in the period concerned (the stock expanded between 1996 and 2001 by approximately 4%).

Table 5: Social housing stock failing Decent Home Standard (2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Local authorities</th>
<th>RSL</th>
<th>All tenures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ODPM 2005.

Table 6 shows the reasons why dwellings do not meet the decent home standard. The most common reason for a dwelling being deemed non-decent is failure to provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (about 80%). Thirty four percent of all local authority dwellings and 22% of the RSL stock fail on thermal comfort (i.e. lack of adequate insulation, poor heating, or both). Eighty two percent of the social rented housing has central heating; 65% has double glazing in part or all of the home. The RSL homes are newer and therefore generally better insulated. Another important reason for non-decency is disrepair. RSL’s perform better than the average. The key building components on which dwellings most frequently fail the disrepair criterion are chimneys (28% of all failing on disrepair), windows (26%), wall structure (14%)

Table 6: Social housing stock failing Decent home standard (2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local authorities</th>
<th>RSL</th>
<th>all tenures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total % failing DHS</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing thermal comfort</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing disrepair</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing fitness</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing modernization</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and roof structure (13%). A small proportion of the social housing stock fails to satisfy either the minimum fitness standard or the modernization standard. Regarding the modernization standard, the most common contributory factors are the age of the kitchen or the bathroom.

In 2001 the total backlog for the UK housing stock is € 74 billion, which is equivalent to an average of € 3,520 per home. If we focus on the social landlords, local authority property would appear to be in poorer condition than that of the housing associations (see Table 5). Otherwise, the backlog for this category is with an average of € 2,420 still more than € 1,100 lower than the average UK home. The property of RSL’s stands out positively in terms of quality, with a backlog of only € 1,500 per home (see Table 4).

CONCLUSIONS

The main features of the social housing stock in the Netherlands and England differ. The social housing stock in the Netherlands is relatively sizable, relatively young and completely owned by housing associations. They manage their housing stock in a market-driven and client-driven way and their performances are controlled by (local) authorities. The English social sector is considerably smaller and older (more than one fifth of the stock is built before WW2) and consists of council housing and houses owned by RSL’s. In the recent past English council housing ownership already has declined sharply (through the sale to tenants and transfers to RSL’s). As a result of the DHS policy it can be expected that the importance of local authority housing will diminish further. Through the regulations set and executed by the English Housing Corporation RSL’s are beginning to catch up with the Dutch Housing Associations and are starting to operate more and more in businesslike manner.

The quality regulations in both countries have a lot in common. The regular Building Regulations are applied in case of major alterations. Local authorities have statutory enforcement powers when the safety and wellbeing of occupants or other people in a dwelling are endangered. Landlords in both countries have legal repair duties. Besides that England combines elements of these instruments in the DHS. All social dwellings must comply with this minimal quality level by 2010. The strong point of this approach is its coherency. The standard is used nationwide. All kinds of incentives to reach the standard are made available by the government/the Housing Corporation to local authorities and RSL’s. Progress towards the standard is measured annually with the EHCS. A possible weak point is the questionable depth and profundity of demands in the standard. The quality levels set in the DHS are partly comparable with those in the Defects Degree in the Netherlands which contains defects that could lead to rent reduction. These are considered in the Netherlands as absolute minimum standards.

We have used the EHCS and KWR results to compare the quality of the social housing stock in England and The Netherlands. However the way quality backlog is defined in England and the Netherlands differs, which makes a univocal comparison a difficult task. The KWR measures the structural quality and the total repair costs to bring the quality up to date. The DHS measurement in England is not limited to structural quality but also covers housing quality (e.g. functional and energy aspects) in a broader sense and the costs (to make decent) only relate to dwellings that do not meet the decent home standard. The actual repair costs for the housing stock could be much higher in England. The Dutch KWR takes all repair costs into account. Even dwellings that do not need any repair are included in the calculation of the average repair costs. This must be taken into account comparing English and Dutch backlog.
statistics. The quality backlog (expressed in repair costs) of an average English RSL dwelling and a Dutch housing association dwelling seems comparable (€1,500 - €1,450). Within England there is a pronounced difference in quality between the social housing stock of local authorities and housing associations (RSL’s). The quality backlog of local authority dwellings is considerably greater.

Our future research will look into possible explanations for these differences in quality. The research will be extended with research into investments and maintenance expenditure. By extending the literature review we will be able to draw more detailed and underpinning conclusions on for instance quality definitions and content and methodology of Decent Home Standard, KWR and EHCS. By including a time range of about ten years (1995-2005) we will be able to answer follow up questions on the effectiveness and efficiency of the quality policy and the methods for measuring the quality currently pursued by government and housing sector in the Netherlands and England. In addition we will study the way housing associations define the concept of quality for their housing stock. We will inform you about the results of future research.

REFERENCES


