all relevant levels, from extremely local to regional, national and even supranational social contexts. For Murie, national policy should enable locally sensible policies to develop, rather than impose a common policy and trust that it will not produce locally damaging effects.

In sum, even if not complete, the book offers a useful and interesting overview of social housing policies in Europe. Substantial statistical evidence is drawn upon with a strong analytical focus. Moreover, the salient and inspiring case studies chosen raise interesting questions that cry out for further research and analysis.

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Housing Market Renewal and Social Class

Housing and class may at first sight appear as a ‘natural’ combination, dating back to the seminal work of Rex and Moore (1967). In their controversial theory on ‘housing classes’, Rex and Moore claimed that homeowners take in the strongest position on the housing market, while renters have the weakest position. The combination of housing and class always involves battle. But could Rex and Moore have foreseen that homeowners might find their position under threat by substantial government-led market forces?

Chris Allen’s new book explores the difficult and uncomfortable question of whether institutions are using the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) programme to make profits at the expense of working-class residents in Liverpool. The use of compulsory purchase orders issued on their homes is an immediate and far-reaching impact on the daily lives of working-class people. This was one of Allen’s motivations to write this book.

One of the starting points of the book is the observation that current literature may convincingly argue that class matters, but fails in showing how exactly class matters. Allen observes three problems which he strives to resolve with his book. First, partly as a result of a focus on middle-class consumption practices, ‘there is an absence of literature on working-class forms of being in the market for houses in the new sociology of class literature’ (p. 5). Second, new sociology of class formation and gentrification literature draws from a Bourdieuan ‘resource epistemology’, which might be appropriate to middle-class analysis, but ‘is less than appropriate to an analysis of working-class formation because a defining characteristic of
working-class-people is, of course, their poverty of resources such as economic and cultural capital’ (p. 5). The lives of inner-urban working-class people are shown to have no way relating to housing consumption other than in practical terms, i.e. in terms of necessities and ‘the practical accomplishment of survival’ (p. 9). Finally, the (gentrification) literature has strongly engaged with middle-class housing consumption, but much less with the ways in which ‘housing consumption is constituted by other actors, notably institutions that regulate and govern activity in the market for houses’ (p. 7).

Allen’s book draws from empirical material from two research studies, one consisting of a range of interviews with households living in Kensington, a major Housing Market Renewal (HMR) area in Liverpool, as well as local stakeholders. The second study consisted of Allen’s participant observation of a public enquiry into the compulsory purchase of houses in Kensington and other inner-urban areas of Liverpool. This was supplemented with an in-depth analysis of a broad range of documents connected to the HMR.

The book is logically composed of three main parts. Part I is called ‘Invitation to Class Analysis’. Two chapters describe what Allen calls the death and resurrection of class in sociology, as well as the common ways in which social class is theorised. Allen’s position is clear: ‘continuing evidence of high levels of social immobility and class discrimination suggest that the class system and the working class are alive and well’ (p. 27). Subsequently, Allen reviews Marxist, Weberian and ‘new’ theories of class and stratification. Through this effort, he shows how the attention has switched from position within the employment structure to engagement in consumption, and, by doing so, focussing on the middle class.

Part II deals with ‘Social Class and the Market for Houses’. Allen shows how ‘working-class people characterise their lives in terms of a close proximity to economic insecurity and necessity. [..] and the world as an entity that makes endless series of urgent demands on them, for example “to get by”’ (p. 70). Official and media representations of Kensington as an area of urban decline are highly different from what Allen calls the ‘lived view’ of Kensington that is articulated by its working-class residents. The aim of HMR is to reposition neighbourhoods with a ‘low demand’ for houses on the metropolitan housing market, by demolishing terraced houses and replacing these with ‘high-value’ products that ‘people want to buy’ (p. 117). This aim is in stark contrast to the working-class experience of Kensington as a largely unproblematic area.

Part III, the core of the book, delves into ‘The Class Politics of Housing Market Renewal’. Here, Allen’s key argument is that institutions that govern the market for houses not only constitute it as a ‘space of positions’ (Bourdieu, 1984) but use regeneration programmes such as Housing Market Renewal (HMR) to impose this dominant view on ‘declining’ urban areas that are supposed to have become disconnected from the space of positions. In other words, the economic interests of
these actors bluntly collide with the urban working class who do not view their homes and neighbourhoods as spaces of position (symbolic economy) in which a position must be conquered, but rather and practically as a place to dwell. Liverpool’s City of Culture programme has heightened the urgency for institutions involved in HMR to sell Liverpool as a successful post-industrial city, but this has ‘produced institutional hostility to the working class, whom the imperative is to remove from view’ (p. 155). Strikingly, HMR efforts to provide affordable housing and relocation opportunities as well as affordable loan products for working-class residents do not constitute help to them, because the efforts impose a requirement to assume higher levels of “mortgage debt” (p. 174). This is at stark contrast with working-class residents’ view on housing as a place to dwell, not as an investment opportunity.

Chris Allen has written an intriguing book that merits a broad readership. To my view, it is intended not just for the usual suspects, i.e. scholars, policymakers and city officials. It is a highly recommendable read for housing developers, architects, regeneration agencies and estate agents who have the nerve to endeavour critical introspection of their own practices. Moreover, the social scientist Allen does not refrain from strongly criticising other ‘members of the academy [who] have been too busy providing “research and intelligence” for HMR partnerships . . . to address issues of power, class and social stratification in analyses of HMR’ (pp. 196–197). This book should spark considerable academic debate too.

Its major contribution is the move beyond the middle class focus in the literature to the importance of working class formation and housing consumption as well as the role of primarily market-oriented institutions in housing consumption and housing market renewal. To my opinion, it is an impressive demonstration of connecting strong engagement with the main research subjects, i.e. working-class residents from Kensington, with proper methodology and high research standards. Allen’s clear and compelling writing style makes this book not only a high-quality one, but also an exciting read.

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