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## Housing Cooperatives in Poland. The Origins of a Deadlock

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### Abstract

Housing cooperatives in Poland have a long history, which began at the end of the nineteenth century. The cooperative movement proposed innovative solutions for housing, as far as the architectural and the social dimensions are concerned especially in the interwar period, and became in the 1960s the most important actor in the housing system in Poland, until the end of the 1980s. Nevertheless, this dominant position contained the roots of a decline of cooperatives which is on-going. Today, 17% of the housing stock belongs to the cooperative sector, but less than 3 % of new dwellings are built by cooperatives. This article analyzes the growth and decline of Polish housing cooperatives during the twentieth century and why we consider that they have reached a deadlock in the neoliberal Poland.

**Keywords:** housing; housing cooperatives; co-ownership; privatization; eastern and central Europe; People's Republic of Poland; Poland.

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## 1. Introduction

Co-housing has become very popular in the 2000s in Western Europe, and is often associated to an emergent issue of affordable and self-managed housing. But it was not always the case, and in Poland, it is not at all “fashionable”. Generations of people born after the war very often lived in a housing cooperative (*spółdzielnia mieszkaniowa*), and this experience was not the result of a choice, but almost the only way for urban dwellers to get a flat. Generally, people now associate cooperatives to bureaucratic ‘monsters’ and to prefabricated blocks in the outskirts of the city. The stereotype view of cooperative blocks is based on this vision. Housing cooperatives are present everywhere in the country, especially

in big cities. They also often occupy the public debate, because in the 1990s and especially in the 2000s, their future has been publicly discussed, engaging more than 5 millions of Poles. This article aims to analyse the long term position of housing cooperatives in the Polish housing system.

Today, co-housing experiences are clearly bottom-up and considered to be empowerment strategies from citizens who try to solve the issue of housing at the very local scale (Bacqué 2010; Marchand 2012), outside state housing policies or even against them. But this was not always the case, especially in Poland. What was actually the relationship between the cooperative sector and the state? How could a model of self-managed housing become paradoxically the mainspring of the housing system in a people's democracy in the post-war period? A wide reflection is taking place in Europe, about new forms of affordable housing: do the national economic and political conditions offer the possibility for cooperatives to play this role in Poland?

To answer these questions, I will focus on the relationship between the state and the housing cooperative sector, because it is the key to understanding the present difficulties of housing cooperatives. I will first present the origins of Polish housing cooperatives; then I will analyze the state policies towards them during the People's Republic of Poland, and its consequences in the housing system; finally, I will explain how the neo-liberal policies have been forcing cooperatives into a difficult process of adaptation, leading them to a turning point for their survival in a deadlocked situation.

## **2.Origins and development of housing cooperatives in Poland**

### ***2.1. Polish housing cooperatives without Poland***

The first cooperatives in Poland are attributed to Stanisław Stazic (1755-1826) who created in 1826 the first 'agricultural society'. The word 'cooperative' did not exist then, it appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It comes from the verb *spółdziałać* or *współdziałać* which is made of the prefix with (*spół*) and the verb to act (*działać*). Housing cooperatives were founded at the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when Poland had been crossed off Europe's map (1795-1918) to the benefit of the empires of the Partition: Russia, Prussia and Austria. While the former Polish territory did not belong to the most industrialized parts of Europe at the time, urban growth was still very high, especially in Greater Poland, under Prussian domination. For example, the population of Wrocław grew from 87,000 inhabitants in 1825 to 422,000 in 1900 and in Warsaw (in the Russian zone of partition) from 150,000 *circa* 1795 to 885,000 in 1914 (Drozdowski 1990). Urban infrastructures did not match this growth, and housing availability thus was very low. The typical urban form of housing during this period of growth was the *dom koszarny* (tenement barracks), a tenement house with high densities offering a low quality accommodation. The 'housing issue', analysed in Friedrich Engels' essay (Engels 1976 [1872]) relying on the examples of England and Germany was also very acute in Polish territories: 22% of dwellings in Wrocław in 1916 consisted of only one room (Maleczyński, Morelowski, and Ptaszycza 1956). In this context of difficult housing conditions, the first housing cooperative, named "Help" (*Pomoc*) was created in the city of Posen (today Poznań). It was an owner-occupancy form of cooperative: members contributed towards financing the houses and became owners after the payment of installments over several years or decades. In Silesia, situated in the southern-western part of the present territory, which also belonged to Prussia before the First World War, other housing cooperatives appeared at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth, on a rent-occupancy model. The background of urban growth, the lack of dwellings, but also this political context explain the development of housing cooperatives: in the absence of a Polish state, and against policies of germanization provided by Prussian authorities, cooperatives offered the Polish people a model of self-management and self-education which was encouraged by Stazic. The same factors had already occurred during

the nineteenth century and explained the development of agricultural cooperatives in the Prussian partition zone, but also in Galicia (in Austria), and in the Poland of Congress (in the Russian part) where the cooperative movement inspired socialist parties (Janczyk 1980).

## 2.2. From tradition to modernity

But the cooperative movement came to enjoy its real boom once the Polish state recovered its sovereignty and encouraged it, through a fund and a law (Andrzejewski 1987). Among other elements of a new housing policy, the National Fund for Reconstruction, created in 1919, aimed to support the efforts of housing reconstruction after the war destructions, since in these new boundaries, about 650.000 dwellings had been destroyed. The law of October 1920 authorized housing cooperatives in Poland, among which housing cooperatives. They could get subsidies from the National Fund for Reconstruction up to 95% of the final cost of construction. The architectural style of these first cooperatives belonged to the “New Manor” (*nowy dwór*) tradition, typical for this time of new sovereignty: even in urban context, architects used to build houses which looked like polish lords’ country houses, with such elements like white walls, columns, a pediment. Symbolically, the manor used to be one of the refuges of the national identity during the times of Partitions (Piwińska 1990) and for this reason was still very popular after 1918 (Figure 1).



Figure1. Cooperative house for Officers in Łódź (Arch. Waclaw Kowalewski, 1925)  
Source: Coudroy de Lille, 2009

The most famous housing cooperatives created thanks to the 1920 law was the Warsaw Housing Cooperative, the WSM (*Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*), created in 1921 by the founder of Polish town planning (Tadeusz Tołwiński), and militants from the Socialist Polish Party (Stanisław Szwalbe, Teodor Toeplitz). According to its statutes, the WSM wished to ‘provide and rent to its members convenient and affordable dwellings thanks to mutual help’ (Turowski 1986). In the 1930s, the cooperative movement became the main vector of spreading for modern architecture and town planning (*author* 2004). The residential cooperative estates of this decade, especially in Warsaw, expressed the convergence of the social, artistic and architectural avant-garde trends (Leśniowski 1996). The most famous



architects of the interwar period worked for the WSM, like Barbara Brukalska and Stanisław Brukalski (estate Żoliborz, Warsaw), Helena and Szymon Syrkus (estate Rakowiec, Warsaw); they also belonged to the group of modern artists and architects *Praesens*, founded in 1926 and participated in the artistic and intellectual movements of Central Europe (Germany, Austria, etc.), to the CIAM. Barbara Brukalska had also a theoretical approach to housing and defended the ideas of ‘social housing estates’ (*osiedle społeczne*) and of *Minimalwohnung*, close to Gropius. Thus, the cooperative housing estates of that time were social and urban entities, for about 3000 to 5000 inhabitants made of small houses with three or four levels, placed in a linear fashion to ensure exposure to sun-shine, and built with modern materials (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Cooperative estate WSM Żoliborz in Warsaw (arch. Barbara Brukalska and Stanisław Brukalski, 1927-32)  
Source: Coudroy de Lille, 2010.

The dwellings were small (from 11 m<sup>2</sup> to 47 m<sup>2</sup> in Brukalska’s houses for instance), but inhabitants could share collective amenities such as leisure rooms, day nursery and a laundry. In the Żoliborz WSM estate, there is also a cinema, a theatre. Like in the first generation of the nineteenth century, the members of cooperatives could own or rent their flat. The historical impact of this generation of cooperatives is very important; nevertheless, one should not forget that in the interwar period, most of dwellings were built from private funds: the quantitative contribution of cooperatives to the dwelling completion remained very low: about 230 cooperatives were registered in 1938 in Poland, with a population of about 30,000 inhabitants (Andrzejewski, 1987). The most famous cooperative housing estates realized before the war by the WSM are Rakowiec (1931-36), Żoliborz (1929-32); some others were started in the 1930s but finished a few years after the Second World War.

### ***2.3. Continuity through the War***

Indeed, the Second World War did not represent a very relevant break in the history of the Polish theoretical approach to housing and urban planning. First, because architects and town planners secretly went on working and teaching during the Nazi occupation. Second, because the political atmosphere between 1945 and 1948 was still ambiguous, allowing some pre-war experiences and policies to continue. This was the case for housing: the minister of reconstruction Michał Kaczorowski announced that the housing issue had to be cared for by the private, the public, and the cooperative sectors, just like before the war. The cooperatives resumed unfinished projects in all major cities (Koło II in 1947, Praga I in 1948 in Warsaw), following the same modernist principles that existed before 1939. But this continuity suddenly stopped at the end of 1948, for political reasons. The socialist and the communist Polish parties merged and formed the Polish Unified Worker's Party (PUWP), directed by its First Secretary Bolesław Bierut. This event marked the beginning of the transformation of the country into the 'People's Republic' of Poland. Politically, it means the introduction of Stalinist principles in the state's policy, including housing. The Three Year Plan (1947-49) emphasized the necessity of industrialization, not of housing expenditures; State funds for Reconstruction were concentrated in regions having priority for economic or political reasons: the capital city, and the industrial conurbation of Upper Silesia. From 1948, the cooperative movement, which originally and by definition expresses the capacity of the society to manage itself, became suspicious. Cooperatives were not disbanded, but their activity was limited to the maintenance of the existing stock and some historical militants were removed. In addition, the state created the Department for Workers' Housing (*Zakład Osiedli Robotniczych*), which was in charge of investing in public dwellings for the working class. Parallel to the centralization of the housing economy, during the period 1949-55, socialist realism came to dominate in the fields of arts, architecture and town planning. This anti-modern aesthetic policy produced in the urban landscapes new classical, monumental buildings and estates, especially in Warsaw, but also in new districts (Nowa Huta in Cracow) or new towns (Nowe Tychy in Upper Silesia). The contrast with the urban creations of the 1930s is startling (Aman 1992 [1987]; Włodarczyk 1991). Thus, the activity of housing cooperatives was put in brackets in the first half of the 1950s. Their subsequent come back was possible by several events: first the death of Stalin in March 1953, then Khrushchev's and Bulganin's Resolution of November 1955 titled "On the renewal of exaggerations in planning and building", and at last, in March 1956 the death of Bolesław Bierut under strange circumstances in Moscow, shortly after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dominated by Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech'.

### **3.Cooperatives in the People's Republic of Poland: come back, power and ruin**

#### ***3.1.From an ideological come back to a pragmatic power***

After the period of socialist realism, housing cooperatives could again work normally under three forms : rental cooperatives, owner-occupancy cooperatives<sup>1</sup>, and cooperative associations of individual houses<sup>2</sup>. The new First Secretary of the PUWP Władysław Gomułka asserted in his 'new housing policy' that the housing situation required a huge effort, and that it should be shared by various actors: the state, but also the private sector (that is to say individuals only), and the cooperatives. This was confirmed by the law 'about cooperative and their unions' in 1961 (Pietrzykowski 2013). A new system of financing was set up for the cooperatives: every citizen could open a savings bank-book with an initial installment - a part of the construction cost of the dwelling that was necessary to be a

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<sup>1</sup> The ownership was a limited one: the house belonged entirely to the cooperative. The so-called cooperative ownership was the right to occupy the dwelling. This right was marketable and inheritable.

<sup>2</sup> These associations were seldom. The cooperative was created to build houses and disappeared once they were built. The ownership was thus transferred to their inhabitants.



cooperative member. The rest of the building cost was covered by members' contributions after moving in, plus state subsidies allocated to cooperatives. The housing cooperatives entered what is seen in their history as a second 'golden age', since they were again supported by the state, which assumed the largest part of the building costs. In state policies, cooperatives appeared then as a pragmatic issue to solve the lack of housing due to the war destructions and to the stress put on industry in public investments (Coudroy de Lille 2004b). As a result, they had to fit with the interests of the central and regional planification and entered a phase of concentration and centralization: the number of cooperatives was stabilized at about 1000 until 1981, whereas the number of people affiliated to them continuously increased - cooperatives accounted on average 175 members in 1960, but 2000 in 1980. In addition, the Central Union of Building and Housing Cooperatives created in 1961 aimed to coordinate and control the activity of all housing cooperatives. Concentration also affected the building process when house-building industry adopted prefabrication technology.

But soon, in the Five Year plan of 'socialist accumulation' (1961-65), the share of public investment in housing fell, and the priority was to build very large housing estates as cheap as possible, including in the city centre (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Za Żelazną Bramą, Warsaw, 1972  
Source: Coudroy de Lille, 2010.

The quality of construction did not improve at all: the generation of dwellings of the 1960s is made of very small flats, according to a decree that set the average useful surface at 11 m<sup>2</sup> per person. The average surface of dwellings built in the socialized sector (made of cooperative and municipal building) went from 50 m<sup>2</sup> in 1958 to 42 m<sup>2</sup> in 1965, including very often a blind kitchen. Furthermore, needs of housing grew up in the 1970s because the second generation of the post-war baby-boom arrived on the 'market'. In this context, The First Secretary of the Party Edward Gierek in 1972 entrusted the cooperatives to answer this demand in his long-term program for housing, which they did. As a result, the great majority

of urban landscape from the socialist period is made of large housing estates built by cooperatives, especially in the big cities: in Warsaw for example, cooperative construction accounted for more than 80 % of all the newly built housing units from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s (Figure 4). About half of those cooperative dwellings were rental, the others being owner-occupancy dwellings at the end of the 1980s. In the case of cooperative tenancy, 10 % of the final cost of dwellings had to be covered by down payment, whereas it reached 20 % for owner-occupancy. Repayments times for the members could run for forty years with low interest rates. But in his new 1972 housing policy, Edward Gierek allowed for repayment periods up to sixty years. This is why the share of housing expenses in household incomes remained very low during the whole socialist period, below 1 % of the average salary until 1980, and still below 5 % until the mid 1980s (Kozłowski 1992).

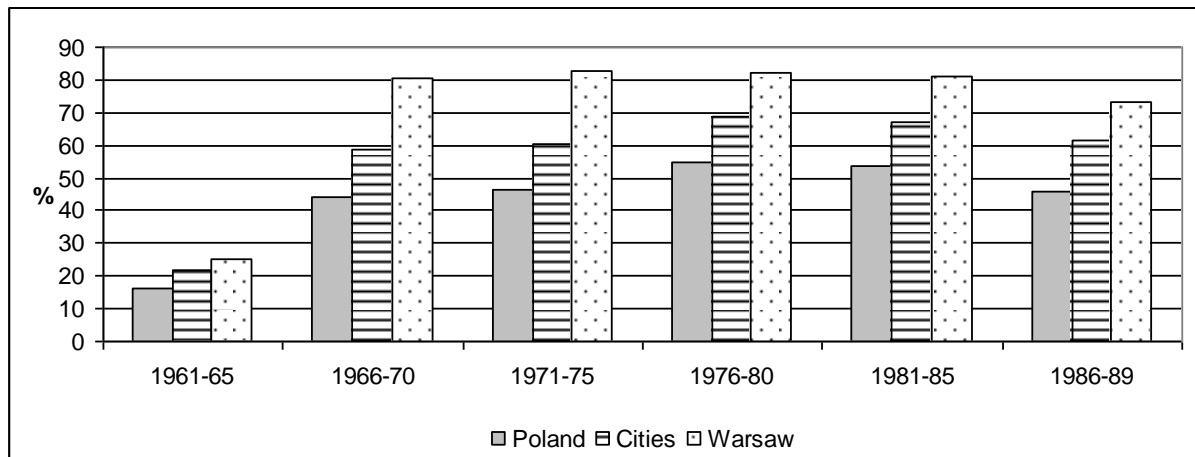


Figure 4. The share of cooperatives in housing construction in Poland (1961 – 1989) author, 2013. Sources: Grabowieska-Łaszek 1988; CZSBM 1987; GUS.

### 3.2. The price of fame

The position of cooperatives with regards to the state was ambiguous and brought them power but also paralysis: on the one hand, they occupied a dominant position in the housing economy (concerning urban areas at least), and received high state subsidies. On the other hand, they were in competition with stronger actors at the local level, whose interests were constantly supported by the state, such as industrial complexes or local administrations. Both of these actors were also involved in housing construction: they used to finance and manage houses for their employees, and until 1965, half of the new dwellings were built by local state authorities and companies. But this share fell in tandem with the growing role of cooperatives. When this occurred, local administrations and companies could get a part of the new dwellings built by cooperatives and transfer them to their workers. Thus, cooperatives provided more and more dwellings for these powerful local actors to the detriment of their own members. In 1980, at a time when the state had stopped building for residential needs, cooperatives could allocate to their members only 30 % of the new dwellings in the socialized sector, whereas they used to build 75 % of them. But of course, not every cooperative member waiting for a flat was employed in a local administration or in a big factory plant: the majority of them had to wait during long years in the cooperative queue. The housing cooperative system was thus definitely part of the ‘economics of shortage’ (Kornai 1984). Although the volume of construction grew continuously up to the end of the 1970s, it did not cover the housing shortage, and thus produced its own roundabouts to avoid the general queue. A widespread feeling of injustice and inequality ensued (Figure 5).



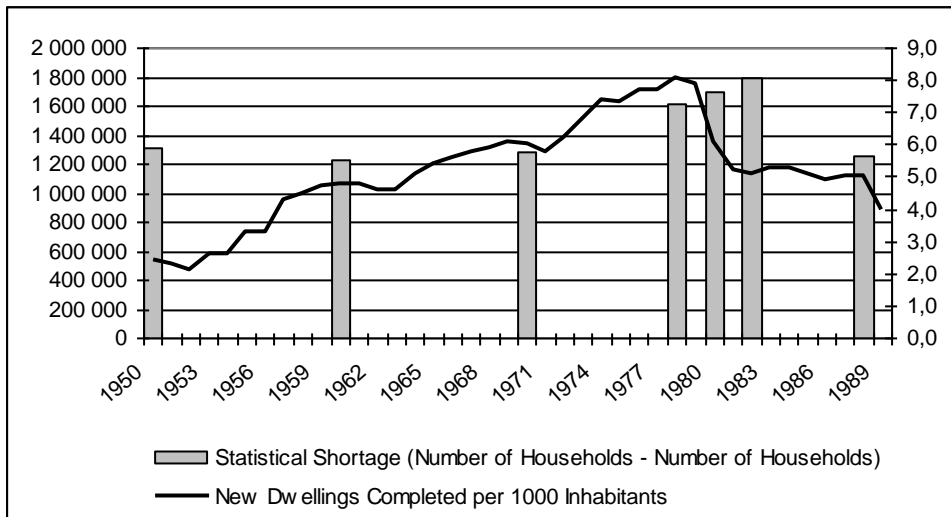


Figure 5. Housing Construction and Housing Shortage in Poland (1960-1989). Coudroy de Lille, 2013. Source : GUS.

This dominant position in the economy of housing had also deep consequences for the nature of cooperatives: far from the social and architectural ideal of small housing estates called ‘social estates’ (*osiedle społeczne*) theorized by the architect Barbara Brukalska (Brukalska 1948), cooperatives of the 1970s had reached huge dimensions, up to 30,000 or 40,000 dwellings. The centralization was incompatible with the earlier principle of self-management. On the contrary, the cooperative council in each of the buildings was supposed to provide and diffuse a ‘socialist way of life’, rather than self-organizing or a sense of community (Madej 2003).

This ‘cooperative way of life’ actually began very often at birth: parents registered their child to the ‘general cooperative queue’ and began to gather the deposit waiting for membership in one cooperative or another. Candidates would eventually form part of a cooperative queue, of which they became members waiting for a dwelling. From 1978 (which is the peak of housing building for the post-war Poland) to 1990, the number of citizens waiting for a cooperative dwelling (inside or at the gate of the cooperative system) has been almost always exceeded the number of cooperative members having a dwelling (Fig. 6).

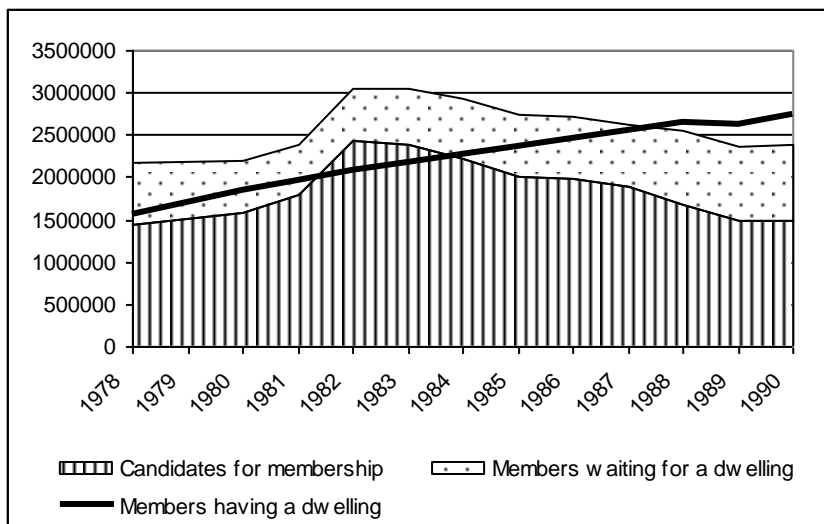


Fig.6. Candidates and members in housing cooperatives (1978-1990) Coudroy de Lille 2014. Source: GUS.

All in all, considering that the rate of available dwellings never exceeded 8 per 1000 inhabitants, and that a significant part of dwellings was excluded from the cooperative queue to the benefit of companies or local authorities, candidates had to wait up to 15 years after the becoming adults. For example, in Warsaw, in 1988, 245,000 persons were registered in the queue, waiting to become member of a cooperative (from which 115,000 had already gathered the deposit, and 48,000 were minors); 42,100 were already registered in a cooperative, waiting for a flat (Gaudray 1995).

The cooperative institution tried in the 1980s to recover some sort of autonomy from the state at the local and at the national level. From 1981, the state encouraged the development of new 'small cooperatives', presented as a return to the roots, and a way to solve the housing shortage. Many of them were created by companies, others brought together members of 'old' cooperatives waiting in vain for a flat, who decided to shift to self-building cooperatives. Between 1981 and 1987, 1793 new small cooperatives were born, out of which 1107 did build about 21,000 dwellings. This represents only 1.5 % of the construction in this period: small cooperatives suffered mainly from a difficult access to plots and materials (Godziejewska 1991).

At the end of the socialist period, the state of paralysis of the cooperative sector was total: to incentivize its reduction, registering new candidates in the queue was forbidden, but at the same time, housing construction fell down to 4 newly built dwellings per 1000 inhabitants (Figure 5). The housing shortage in Poland was estimated to 1.4 million dwellings, and a major part of this burden was attributed to the cooperative sector. Thus, when the socialist regime fell, the cooperative sector was in a very critical situation and had lost people's trust, which was the result of its trajectory since the 1960s. This legacy raises the question of its adaptability in market economy conditions.

## **4. Housing cooperatives in the market economy**

### **4.1. From cooperatives to co-ownerships**

Housing in Poland since 1990 has become market oriented, and the structures of housing economy have turned to a disengagement of the state from it at least at the beginning of the decade. Actually, it was already the case in construction itself since the end of the 1970s since the state could take from the cooperative housing stock for its needs at the local scale. The process of housing privatization in Eastern Europe has been widely described in the literature (Andrusz, Harloe, and Szelenyi 1996; Barks, O'Leary, and Rabenhorst 1996; Clapham and Murice 1996; Dawidson 2005; Enyedi 1998; Hegedüs, Mayo, and Tosics 1996; Hegedüs and Tosics 1998; Lowe and Tsenkova 2003; Lux 2001, 2003). It contains the introduction of market principles in housing financing, including bank credits, access to materials and the management of the housing stock. The state stopped to subsidy housing construction directly, and like in other countries from the former socialist Europe, the housing issue was decentralized to the municipalities which were now responsible for the allocating funds or designating plots, as well as for social issues for their poorest inhabitants. But unlike neighboring countries, Poland had to find means to solve the specific issue of housing cooperatives. The major change for cooperatives were the introduction of privatization of dwellings, and the end of the financial support from the state (Kozłowski 1996, 1992). The cooperative movement ceased to be an auxiliary of state housing policy, and had to adapt itself to the market economy. The Housing Ownership Act of 1994 introduced co-ownership in the Polish Law; and the 2000 Act for Cooperatives instituted the conditions under which they can be privatized and transformed into co-ownerships. If the majority of members decided, they could buy the dwellings. But there were two ways for cooperative tenants to buy their flat. Either they would get a 'separate ownership' (concerning only the flat itself), which

cancelled their link to the cooperative. Or they could shift to a ‘cooperative ownership’ as in the traditional framework, and remained still members of the cooperative. Both types of ownership are marketable and inheritable but in the case of separate ownership, the buyer has to cover the notary’s fees, and becomes owner of a part of the real estate. In the second case, the cooperative remains the owner of the real estate. Very often people did not have the choice: if the building was standing on a plot whose cooperative was neither the full owner nor the perpetual usufruct, then the cooperative ownership remained obligatory. Actually this was very often the case, because during the socialist period, cooperatives were allocated huge plots without legal regularization, without notarial deed. This is why the share of cooperative dwellings in the housing stock has first increased from 1988 to 2002 (some cooperative buildings were completed after the 1990 turn) and is slowly decreasing from 2002 to 2011 (table 1). But inside the cooperative housing stock, about 70 % of dwellings are now in owner occupancy, whereas during the socialist period, the proportion was stabilized at the half of it.

Table1. Share of cooperative dwellings in the polish housing stock from 1988 to 2011

%	Total	Cities
1988	24,3	36,7
2002	28,6	40,8
2007	24,4	35,7
2011	17,5	26,2

Coudroy de Lille 2013. Source : GUS.

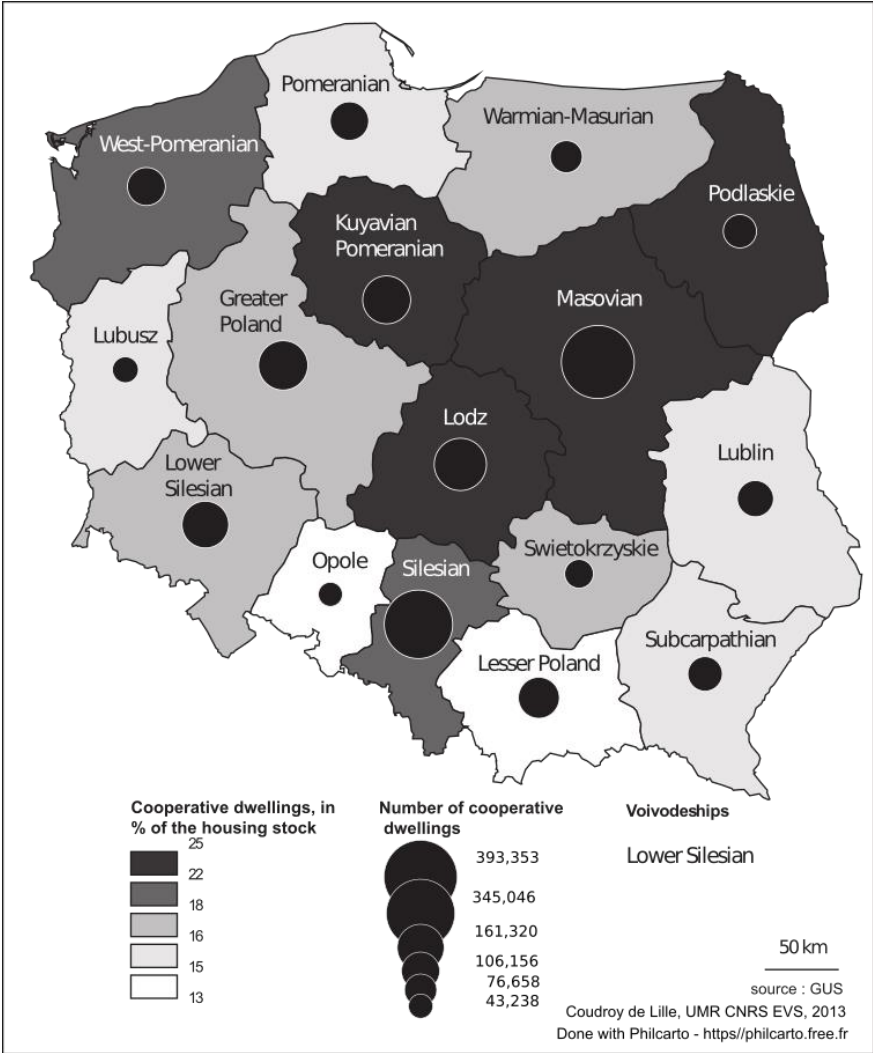


Figure 7. Cooperative dwellings in the Polish regions in 2011



The figures clearly show that the cooperative housing stock is a declining legacy in the housing system, but still important in cities. The cooperative issue concerns every region, especially the most urbanized and industrialized voivodeships like Lodz, Masovian, Silesian (Fig. 7). In this unstable legal situation, what can be the social, economical or political future of housing cooperatives?

#### 4.2. Do cooperatives contribute to the supply of affordable housing?

The number of cooperative dwellings in Poland will probably continue to decrease. Although some of them are in bad conditions, Polish housing policy does not up to now include programs of demolition/reconstruction, such as in France or in Germany (Roth 2011; Epstein 2013) because of a general context of housing shortage. One million of dwellings are still missing in Poland, when considering the difference between the number of households and the number of dwellings (GUS, 2011), and 13% of Poles in 2010 suffered from severe housing deprivation in contrast with 5,7 % of the population in the European Union (Eurostat). But the cooperative sector is not anymore supposed to resolve to the housing shortage, as it was in the 1960s and in the 1970s. The renewal of the cooperative housing stock is now very low, because a very few of them go on building: only 3500 cooperative dwellings were completed in 2013, which represent 2.4% on a total of 145,000 completed dwellings in the country. Thus they are not able to resolve the housing shortage, just from a quantitative point of view. Furthermore, they cannot either take up the challenge of affordable housing: cooperative dwellings, even rental, were never a type of ‘social’ housing in the socialist period. Insterad, they used to provide dwellings for the largest sectors of society. Although the architecture of cooperative housing estates is reminiscent of social housing estates elsewhere in Western countries, they never had (except in theory in the pre-war period) and still do not have this role. Social housing has always been the matter of local authorities, occupying old buildings generally situated in the inner city. In 1995 the Social Building Societies (*Towarzystwo Budownictwa Społecznego*, TBS) were created by the law. They provide social housing just like municipalities, and own about 80 000 dwellings. They could apply for credits from the National Housing Fund, just like cooperatives building rental dwellings. But this fund was cancelled in 2009: the offer of non-profit rental dwellings is thus dramatically low today. Altogether, the rental housing stock (owned by companies, municipalities, TBS or cooperatives) has shifted from 58 % in 1988 to 20 % in 2011 (GUS).

In the current housing market, it is hard to compare the price of rental cooperative flats to other rental dwellings (Table 2). The rent itself is much lower in cooperatives, but since the fees for water and energy is now estimated within each dwelling, the total rent may be much more expensive than in the rest of the tenant housing stock (Instytut Rozwoju Miast 2011).

Table 2. Average rent for a 3 person’s household in a 50 m<sup>2</sup> dwelling in 2010 (in złoty per month)

Types of rental dwellings	Rent	Water, Energy, Garbage Disposal
Private	550	994
TBS	426	662
Municipal	291	655
Cooperative	129	nd

Source : Instytut Rozwoju Miast, 2011, *Informacje o mieszkalnictwie*.

Note: The exchange rate is about 4 złoty per 1 euro.

The chances for a renewal of the cooperative sector in the future are weak, for economical and social reasons. The political context since 1990 has been creating very unstable and difficult conditions of work for cooperatives: the fall of cooperative share in house building to less than 3 % reflects this evolution. The most common way to get a dwelling now is to buy one from a developer or to build as an individual (Figure 8). Cooperatives, municipalities,

TBS and companies together built 7500 dwellings in 2013, that is to say 5 % of the new dwellings. But in addition, all of these institutions -even TBS- lost a part of their stock in recent years because they were encouraged to practise the ‘right to buy’. And the private market does not fill this gap. Thus the opportunities to enter the housing market renting a flat are decreasing, especially for the middle class.

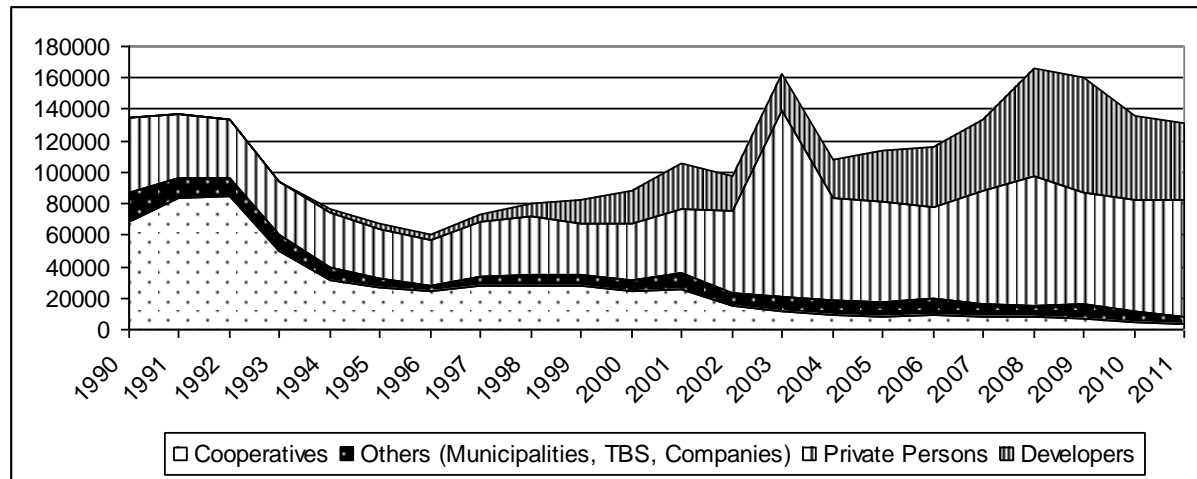


Figure 8. Dwellings completed by sector in Poland from 1990 to 2011  
Coudroy de Lille 2013. Source : GUS

Furthermore, for generations of Poles, cooperatives are associated to long years in the cooperative housing queue, to a generally poor quality of building and of architecture, and to a heavy bureaucracy. They are definitely perceived as a legacy from the socialist times. During decades of housing shortage, the cooperative way of housing was the only one for urban population, and the majority of it endured frustration because of the unequal and non-transparent allocation of flats. This is why in the popular language, cooperatives are often named ‘moloch’, from the Ammonite god Moloch evoking a monster who requires costly sacrifices. The dictionary of Polish language also defines a moloch like ‘a big, overwhelming, unfriendly city, housing estate or a faulty institution’<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the 2000s, a new cooperative model is arising, undertaken by a new generation, that is highlighting the critical effects of the new housing market, dominated by private actors, especially developers. Some of them are organizing projects of so called “micro-cooperatives” (Czeredys, Topiński, and Szafranski 2011). The idea of these, often young architects is to provide a bottom-up model of housing that could change the city itself through small cooperatives (less than 20 dwellings) including houses in ownership and tenant dwellings. This young generation of activists refers to examples from Austria, Germany, Sweden or the Netherlands, but also to Polish historical experiences of cooperatives like WSM in Warsaw.

## 5. Conclusion

The cooperative movement is thus represented today by two very different trends. On the one hand, young architects are connected to other European experiences and networks; they do not ignore the past, and would like to take from the history the cooperative spirit of the 1930s. On the other hand, organizations of the cooperative traditional sector are still alive, and apart from managing its stock, they participate in the political debate, supported mainly by the post-communist party (SLD) and the peasants party (PSL). The first newly emerging movement and the second one, which is well established, both retain nostalgia for the inter-

<sup>3</sup> ‘Duże, przytłaczające, nieprzyjazne ludziom miasto, osiedle; też: duża, niesprawna instytucja’, *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, <http://sjp.pwn.pl>

war period of cooperatives, but this is the only connecting point between them; they do not share any common actions or objectives.

Nevertheless, both are concerned by the transformation of the legal framework of cooperatives. It has been threatened since 2011 by a bill proposed by the liberal party Civic Platform according to which cooperatives would be obliged to shift to co-ownerships. Either the Cooperative Act of 2000 will be once again amended, or a new act will be written. Millions of persons are concerned, and have to make their opinion, but they are probably lost because the debate is very confusing and longlasting. Anyway, the unregulated status of many plots on which cooperative estates stand makes the implementation of any reform difficult. But the cooperative issue does have great political magnitude in some regions where one quarter of the dwelling stock still belongs to cooperatives (fig. 7).

The cooperative sector is thus a complex legacy in the history of Polish cities. First, it represents a social and ideological patrimony which has never ceased to be a positive reference for town planners, architects, even in the worst period for cooperatives, when they provided huge housing estates and were the major actor of the housing shortage in the 1980s. But this collective memory has not been extended to any wider social practices such as tours or urban museum that would show the shared nature of this patrimony even in the most famous cooperative estates. Second, cooperatives have given present generations 2,300,000 dwellings mostly built in prefabricated materials during the 1960s and the 1970s. Of course, a lot has already been done to maintain the structural soundness of this stock and to improve conditions of living in these buildings (Chmielewski and Mirecka 2001).

The cooperative experience of housing in Poland is a paradox: it went through a decline precisely when it had most power. From the 1970s onward, they received much from the state: plots, subsidies, and political power. But they did not receive enough means to resolve the housing issue, and were hostages in this relationship, losing their autonomy, their own dwellings, and their functional identity. Housing cooperatives left a huge material and legal legacy in the housing system, but their legal framework in particular is today being challenged. Who will take over the maintenance of the cooperative housing stock in the next decades? Is there a chance for a renewal of housing cooperatives on the roots of Polish long term experiences? It depends on the amendment of the law about cooperatives. Counter to the wider European context where, like the 2014 'participative housing' law passed in France, innovation in housing through cohousing, housing associations, and cooperatives in the third sector are being encouraged, the legal framework of cooperative in Poland is under threat. This potential cancellation raises the question of the emergence of cohousing or micro-cooperatives in the future.

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