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In most Western European countries, the beginning of 20th century marked the development of social housing sectors as a response to both the growing housing needs of newly formed urban working class and the substandard living conditions of most urban dwellers at that time. During the so-called “thirty glorious years”, which started from the post–conflict reconstruction, a massive state-led social housing production contributed to define the main traits of the modern city shaping the social structure and identities of urban neighbourhoods. To different extent, in Western Europe social housing was more or less integrated to welfare state systems ensuring the right to housing and representing an important driver of social inclusion. This golden age for social housing, which had been governed almost entirely by public action, came to an end since the mid–1970s. Cities were affected by profound changes spurred by de-industrialisation processes, the restructuring of the labour market and reduction in welfare investments under the influence of neo-liberal politics. In this context, social housing became increasingly residual and subject to growing concerns about the exclusion of its inhabitants. To paraphrase Robert Castel, at this stage there is a “metamorphosis” of the housing issue wherein social housing provision became increasingly targeted to the most deprived social groups. As Harloe showed, this residual model became widespread in different countries in both Europe and the United States, despite contextual differences. To tackle the growing stigmatization of social housing and the marginalization of its dwellers, large scale urban renewal programmes driven by national governments were launched at the end of 20th century aimed at increasing the levels of social mix through tenure diversification. The 21st century poses new housing-related challenges for contemporary cities. The state alone is no longer able to be a lever of inclusion and integration. Growing socio-economic inequalities are reflected in rising levels of residential segregation between different groups within cities exacerbating the stigmatization of social housing neighbourhoods. The refugees’ crisis is also posing new questions in terms of both housing provision and integration processes. In addition,
increasing commodification of housing along with the effects of post-GFC austerity policies contribute to worsen the crisis of housing affordability which involves a pool of different social categories, including urban middle classes. This session invites both theoretical and empirical contributions from different disciplines and geographical contexts to discuss trends and challenges for housing policy in the 21st century. Topics may include:

(i) Social housing and the welfare state in times of neo-liberalism, including cross-country analysis of the impact of global financial crisis on social housing systems and recent evolution in the position of housing as a welfare state service.

(ii) Social innovation in housing: how new actors and new governance arrangements are addressing contemporary challenges related to housing affordability and social integration of vulnerable groups in urban environments.

(iii) Urban renewal and housing, including studies on the local experiences of public/social housing tenants affected by urban regeneration policy and the outcomes in terms of inclusion/integration.

(iv) Informal housing, social movements and right to housing; including analysis of everyday practices of inhabitants of social/public housing against risks of vulnerability and exclusion.