

# Chapter 17

## Population Shifts and Urban Policies in Housing Estates of Tallinn, Estonia



Kadri Leetmaa, Johanna Holvandus, Kadi Mägi and Anneli Kährik

**Abstract** Housing estates in the Tallinn urban region are interesting objects of research in many respects. First, as in other post-socialist European cities, the proportion of the population residing in socialist-era apartments is extraordinarily high here. Second, residential units in housing estates were originally state-built and run but are almost fully privatised today. Third, post-Soviet housing estates tend to be multi-ethnic, much like similar residential districts in many other European cities. This chapter reveals that Tallinn housing estates are experiencing gradual social decline: within the first two decades of post-socialism, a remarkable ageing of the population has taken place, the proportion of people with low socio-economic status has increased dramatically in some estates while others have succeeded in remaining relatively stable in this respect, and patterns of ethnic and socio-economic segregation have increasingly overlapped. Interestingly, this silent social decline is not acknowledged by contemporary urban actors. In the early transition years, institutional rearrangements were made (privatisation, new housing management and urban planning rules), but this was followed by a period of political neglect until the late 2000s. Although recent interventions (e.g. social housing projects, densification of housing estates by private developers, support for the renovation of panel buildings and rising community activism) have been more targeted, these policies remain rather chaotic generally. No vision exists for how the efforts of different actors and sectoral policies should stabilise housing estates in the longer run. There seems to be a race against time—although investments and efforts are being made to improve the residential quality of housing estates, this is not sufficient to counterbalance their ongoing stigmatisation and population changes.

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## 17.1 Introduction

Post-World War II housing estates have long been targets for urban policy-makers throughout Europe. Housing estates in formerly socialist countries are physically similar to those elsewhere in Europe (Glasze et al. 2012), meaning that assumptions about contemporary urban problems and suitable measures in these districts are sometimes made without sufficient critical reflection. This chapter broadens the scholarly knowledge of the ongoing population shifts and experimental interventions taking place in modernist housing estates in European cities by presenting the case of Tallinn, the capital of a former Soviet republic.

Housing estates in post-socialist Europe are a specific case because a high proportion of the population resides in socialist-era apartments and urban housing is in almost full private ownership. The majority of the dwellings in many former Soviet cities are located in housing estates. In East Central European cities, the estimated proportion is 20–40% (Temelová et al. 2011). In the Tallinn urban region of today, half the residents live in housing estate apartments (Table 17.1). Privatisation of state-owned housing was launched in the early 1990s in Estonia and by the end of the decade almost all residential units belonged to private home owners. Generous public subsidies to maintain buildings and public spaces were then withdrawn and former public tenants lacked the skills and financial resources to act as owners.

Housing estates in former Soviet republics are also interesting areas of research because of their multi-ethnic (in Tallinn, Estonian–Russian) residential

**Table 17.1** Population of housing estates in Tallinn and its surrounding municipalities, 1989–2011

	1989		2000		2011	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Tallinn</i>						
Housing estates	288,153	60.2	251,582	62.8	227,190	57.9
Other neighbourhoods	190,821	39.8	148,770	37.2	165,476	42.1
<i>Surrounding municipalities</i>						
Housing estates	30,768	50.1	26,753	37.9	23,925	22.2
Other neighbourhoods	30,693	49.9	43,907	62.1	84,002	77.8
<i>Tallinn Urban Region</i>						
Housing estates	318,921	59.0	278,335	59.1	251,115	50.2
Other neighbourhoods	221,514	41.0	192,677	40.9	249,478	49.8

Source Estonian Censuses 1989, 2000, 2011

environments. In Tallinn, as in other European cities that have hosted large flows of immigrants, modernist housing estates were the destinations of arriving immigrants. The inflow of Russian-speaking populations accompanied the rapid industrialisation and allocation of Soviet military forces to Estonia. By the end of the 1980s, almost half of the population of Tallinn were Russian-speakers (1989 Census). The case of Tallinn, thus, illustrates the trajectories of mixed-ethnic housing estates in an almost fully privatised housing market where the housing estate apartment is the prevailing dwelling type.

In this chapter, we first explain how housing estates were planned and built in the Tallinn urban region during the socialist period and what position these districts acquired on the socio-spatial landscape of a Soviet city. Our empirical contribution is divided into two sections. First, we analyse the demographic and socio-economic trajectories of housing estates in the post-socialist period using cross-sectional individual data from the last three censuses (1989, 2000, 2011) to demonstrate how mean age, proportion of low-social status inhabitants and Russian-speakers have changed in housing estate neighbourhoods. Second, we give an overview of how public policies have changed in response to these trends basing our analysis on expert interviews and the long-term field experience of the authors. Seven individual expert interviews and one focus group were used. The interviewees include planning officials in Tallinn today, former high officials in the field of planning and representatives of civic movements, apartment associations and private housing development projects.

## 17.2 The Origin of Housing Estates in Soviet Cities

Here, as well as elsewhere in Europe, large-scale housing construction in Estonia was a response to both a rapid industrial and population growth in Soviet cities and a severe post-World War II housing shortage. In the capital of Estonia, very intense immigration from Russia and other Soviet republics and internal migration made the housing shortage even more acute. During the first few Soviet decades, loyal workers were needed in administrative posts. In addition, military investments encouraged the immigration of military personnel. Throughout the Soviet period, Estonia's industrial capacity grew, which required an additional immigrant workforce, and later, family migration supported further immigration. With respect to internal migration, the former agricultural sector suffered from collectivisation and deportations in the 1940s and 1950s. At the same time, new industrial jobs made cities attractive destinations, even though special permission was needed to access urban housing.

The first large-scale housing construction programmes (using brick-technology, known as *khruščchëvki*) were launched in the late 1950s. These were mostly built as single in-fills or small groups of buildings on vacant plots close to the city centre. In Tallinn, for example, the development of Pelguranna district was initiated in this period. Since the 1960s, industrial housing construction (prefabricated panel

technology) has become prevalent and construction activities in Tallinn have been concentrated in three larger master-planned housing estate districts: Mustamäe (30,500 apartments), Väike-Õismäe (14,500) and Lasnamäe (47,000) (Fig. 17.1).

In order to manage overcrowding, industrial investment was decentralised and directed to specialist industrial satellite towns adjacent to major Soviet cities (e.g. St. Petersburg, Moscow and Riga). In Tallinn, the initial decentralisation policies were less extensive. The largest satellite town established in the Tallinn agglomeration was Maardu (17,500 inhabitants, 2011 Census), which was the location of both the chemical industry and a port, and where all the historical layers of socialist housing can still be seen today.

It is noteworthy that prefabricated panel technology was also used in rural housing construction too. By the 1970s, collective agricultural enterprises in Estonia had become important producers. As a result, prestigious jobs now became available in rural settlements around Tallinn as well. To provide housing for agricultural workers, smaller rural housing estates were built. As the former Chief Architect of Tallinn commented: ‘the fabrics of building materials were working, panels were steadily produced, they needed to be used.’

Figure 17.1 presents the variety of housing estates in the Tallinn urban region. The peak of mass housing construction occurred in the 1970s and 1980s (in rural centres in the 1980s, the golden period of Soviet agriculture). Some projects were



**Fig. 17.1** Examples of housing estates in Tallinn urban region: (upper left photo) brick houses in Pelguranna/Tallinn (some buildings have new façades today); (upper right photo) prefabricated panel blocks in round-shaped Väike-Õismäe/Tallinn; (lower left photo) housing estates in Maardu satellite town; (lower right photo) smaller scale housing estates in the suburban-rural centre of Saku. *Source* Johanna Holvandus and Annika Väiko

finalised in the early 1990s but had been initiated before that. By the end of the Soviet period (1989), 60% of the residents of Tallinn and 50% of the inhabitants of the surrounding municipalities (rural centres and satellite towns) lived in housing estate neighbourhoods (Table 17.1).

### 17.3 Spatial and Socio-Spatial Reality in Soviet Housing Estates

In addition to mass housing construction being a technological response to the housing shortage in Tallinn, as well as elsewhere in Europe, it was also envisaged to be in line with Soviet ideology as part of building a collective and just society. Theoretically, everyone was entitled to access to modern housing, and all new apartments were similar and equipped with contemporary modern facilities. The planning approaches of the time supported the equality principle as well. The main unit of the new residential districts became the *mikrorayon*, a self-contained neighbourhood with standardised high-rise apartment blocks. As for services and infrastructure, universal access was to be provided to amenities such as schools and childcare, personal services, car parks, public transport, greenery and recreation facilities.

Larger housing estate districts usually consisted of several *mikrorayons* and were carefully master-planned through prestigious architectural competitions (Metspalu and Hess 2018). Mustamäe is a good example in which we can follow the development of planning ideas from the initial more haphazard placement principles of residential buildings (as seen also in the older Pelguranna housing estate district: Fig. 17.1) to the more extensive application of the *mikrorayon* approach. In Väike-Õismäe, the *mikrorayon* idea was developed further with the residential buildings there placed in a circular fashion (Fig. 17.1) around the recreation area. Schools and kindergartens are located within the circle, and shops, services and public transport stops are on the main ring road. The master plan for Lasnamäe, the latest and the largest housing estate district of Tallinn, gives special attention to connections with the city centre (a fast tram line, although never finished, was envisaged) and to safe pedestrian roads (walkers' bridges). Some smaller housing estate districts depended on the infrastructure of the surrounding areas and were either built close to larger residential areas (Astangu in the 1980s next to Väike-Õismäe) or as in-fills in older districts. Because construction plans needed to be fulfilled, some districts were also built more spontaneously in more isolated locations. In the satellite town of Maardu, services and infrastructure were planned too, but residential construction was not as carefully organised there as it was in the larger housing estate districts of Tallinn. Compared to the large blocks of flats in Tallinn and Maardu, a more human-scale environment was built in rural centres, where the smaller housing estates were designed as extensions of existing settlements.

The ideal of equality was never achieved, however, because in reality not everyone had access to new dwellings, and socialist-era planning ideas were never fully put into practice. Although administrative rules for allocating apartments were needs-based and families with children, for example, officially had priority (Kulu 2003), people waited for apartments for many years. In general, large industrial employers and the army were able to provide housing for their personnel more quickly. This shows the ethnic differentiation in access to housing as arriving immigrants who did not have alternative dwellings more easily received modern apartments (Hess et al. 2012). A similar shortage of resources existed in realising spatial plans. Because ever more housing was needed, when the residential buildings had been constructed in each housing estate, priorities typically shifted to new construction sites, and the infrastructure of the former sites remained unfinished.

Due to these unforeseen side effects, specific forms of segregation developed in Soviet cities. In a workers' society no salient upper or lower class emerged, and levels of socio-economic segregation, therefore remained modest. At the same time, ethnic segregation was noticeable. Some people had higher chances of receiving a new apartment (including the immigrant population) and others (most commonly Estonians) inhabited older housing areas that did not enjoy state subsidies and were due for demolition. Some districts were better equipped with infrastructure or better situated within the city in relation to, for example, public transport, workplaces, or environmental pollution. Micro-scale residential differentiation (a preferred floor in a building, or dwellings with better building material) also often existed.

Despite these shortcomings, the reputation of housing estates remained high until the end of Soviet period. There were, however, signs that a spatially monotonous mixed-ethnic built environment had lost its attraction, especially among native Estonians. For example, the phrase 'Stop Lasnamäe' from a popular song of the Singing Revolution became a symbol of the national independence movement of the late 1980s.

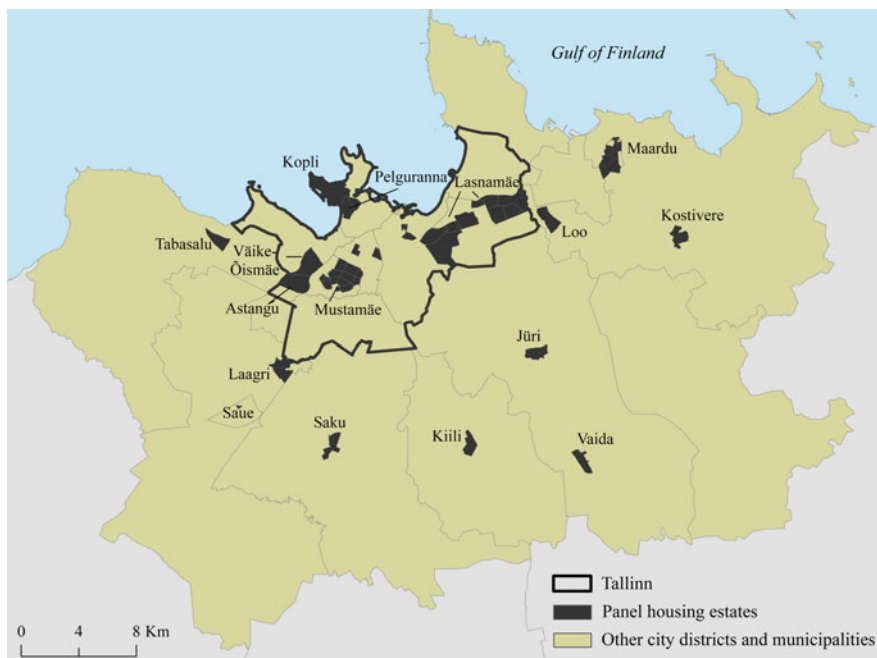
## **17.4 Population Shifts in Housing Estates Since the Late Soviet Period**

Although equal distribution of social groups in urban space was the aim of socialist urban planning, no geographical microdata were made available to assess whether these aims were achieved. Today, almost 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet state, individual-level 1989 Census data are accessible to researchers. We are, therefore, able to compare the population composition of housing estates of the Estonian capital city region at the moment of the last Soviet census with the situations after the first (2000 Census) and second (2011 Census) transition decades.

We define neighbourhoods based on the spatial units used administratively in planning-related activities, and which are as a rule socially and spatially

homogeneous areas. Among these units, we distinguish housing estates as: all neighbourhoods in Tallinn with at least 1000 inhabitants and in surrounding municipalities with at least 500 inhabitants where the majority of residents (80% in Tallinn, 70% in the suburbs) live in Soviet-era apartments (this also includes buildings of the same type that were finished in the 1990s) according to the 2011 Census. Figure 17.2 presents the location of housing estates according to this definition in the Tallinn urban region. Pelguranna and Kopli (late 1950s and 1960s) are the oldest housing estate neighbourhoods, Mustamäe (1960s and 1970s), Väike-Õismäe (1970s and early 1980s), Lasnamäe (late 1970s and 1980s) are typical master-planned larger housing estate areas following the *mikrorayon* principle, and some smaller housing estates closer to the city centre are in-fills from different periods. In the surrounding municipalities, Maardu is a classic industrial satellite town and other housing estates are the central settlements of collective agricultural enterprises.

In the 1990s, considerable changes occurred in the economic structure and social stratification of the country. Many former industrial jobs disappeared, and people needed to adjust to the requirements of new branches of employment. The position of the Russian-speaking population changed from being a majority population in the Soviet Union to a minority ethnic group in the country. State funding to build new housing and to maintain publicly owned housing stock ended and new



**Fig. 17.2** Location of housing estates in the Tallinn urban region. *Data Source* Estonian Censuses 1989, 2000, 2011

attractive choices gradually developed in the metropolitan housing market (gentrifying inner-city apartments, new suburban single-family homes, new privately developed apartment buildings, former summer homes as potential permanent dwellings, etc.). These trends started to affect the relative position of housing estates.

Only minor changes were seen in the proportions of people living in housing estate neighbourhoods within the capital city (60% in 1989 and 58% in 2011). At the same time, the ongoing construction of suburban housing has created many alternative choices in the surrounding municipalities. The proportion of inhabitants in housing estate neighbourhoods in suburban municipalities fell from 50 in 1989 to 22% in 2011 (Table 17.1).

The mean age (Table 17.2) of housing estate inhabitants increased in both urban and suburban housing estate neighbourhoods (in Tallinn from 35 in 1989 to 42 in 2011, in suburban municipalities from 29 to 38, respectively). Although population ageing is a general trend in the Tallinn urban region, ageing foremost characterises housing estates. It is noteworthy that the population of housing estates was on average younger than the population of other neighbourhoods in 1989, both within the city and in surrounding areas. This situation had reversed by 2011.

Figure 17.3 demonstrates how the populations of housing estates built in different decades gradually became older. In 1989 (Fig. 17.3), the mean age was below 35 in most of the housing estates in Tallinn, in Maardu, and also in rural centres. Only in Pelguranna and Mustamäe was the population relatively older (35–40). The mean age of the population was also slightly higher in Väike-Õismäe, in older parts of Lasnamäe, in some newer housing estates in Northern Tallinn and in Maardu (30–35). The population was youngest in Astangu, in the newer neighbourhoods of Lasnamäe, and in all rural housing estates where peak construction was in the 1980s. Figure 17.3 illustrates how the ageing process follows the chronology of construction of respective housing estates. By 2011, only some housing estate neighbourhoods within the city had a mean age of lower than 40. Industrial satellite Maardu and rural housing estates in Saku and Jüri also resembled the urban housing estates in 2011. The population of other rural housing estates, Astangu and some Lasnamäe neighbourhoods were relatively younger.

We estimated socio-economic differentiation on the basis of the proportion of the working-age population (18–64) who were either unemployed or working in low-status occupations. We used occupational groups defined in the international ISCO-classification and defined ISCO groups 5–9 as low-status jobs (service and sales workers; skilled agricultural and fishery workers; craft and related trades workers; plant and machine operators and assemblers; elementary occupations). In 2000 and 2011, we also merged unemployed people with this group, whereas in 1989 unemployment was almost non-existent and, therefore, not identified in the data. We admit that the interpretation of occupational groups in different years is somewhat controversial. Industrial employment was high at the end of the Soviet period and low-skilled jobs were not necessarily low-status jobs in terms of salary levels and prestige.

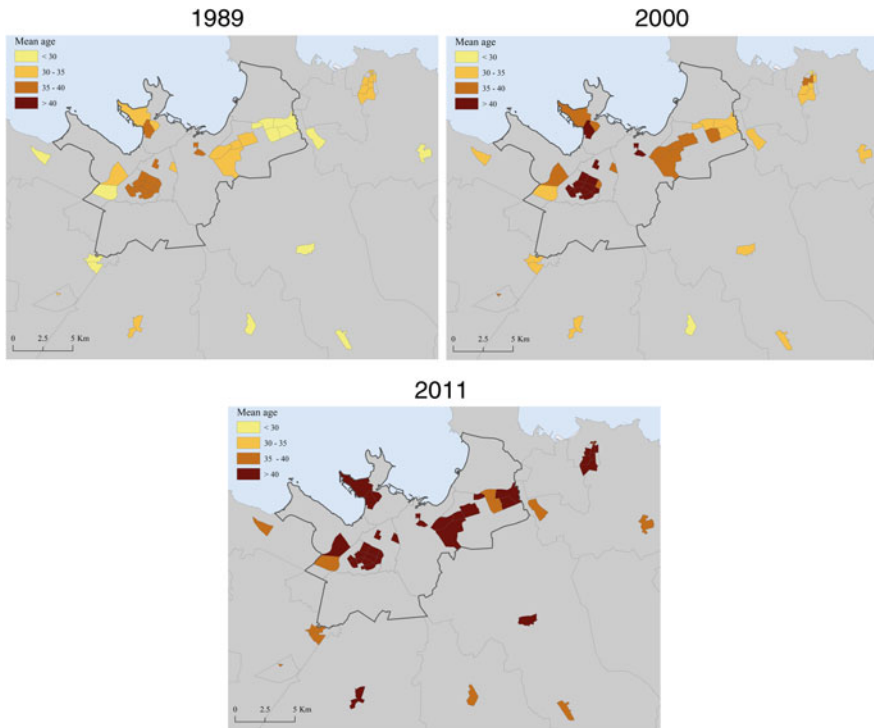


**Table 17.2** Mean age, proportion of low socio-economic status residents, and Russian-speakers in the housing estates of the Tallinn urban region, 1989–2011

	Tallinn		Surrounding municipalities				Tallinn Urban Region			
	Housing estates		Other neighbourhoods		Housing estates		Other neighbourhoods			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Total no.	Total %		
<i>Russian-speakers</i>										
1989	160,356	55.6	70,535	37.0	12,248	69.3	5,421	30.7	248,560	46.0
2000	133,433	53.0	39,678	26.7	11,931	44.6	4,932	11.2	189,974	40.3
2011	133,836	58.9	39,386	23.8	8,178	34.2	8,901	10.6	190,301	38.0
<i>Low SE status</i>										
1989	21,146	50.0 <sup>a</sup>	14,284	54.7 <sup>a</sup>	2,618	59.1 <sup>a</sup>	2,91 <sup>a</sup>	65.8 <sup>a</sup>	40,960	53.2 <sup>a</sup>
2000	70,013	41.6 <sup>b</sup>	32,317	33.4 <sup>b</sup>	8,677	48.6 <sup>b</sup>	10,304	37.1 <sup>b</sup>	121,311	39.0 <sup>b</sup>
2011	63,022	42.1 <sup>b</sup>	29,205	26.1 <sup>b</sup>	7,433	45.4 <sup>b</sup>	14,643	27.3 <sup>b</sup>	114,303	34.5 <sup>b</sup>
<i>Mean age</i>										
1989	34.7		36.1		29.4		35.5		34.9	
2000	38.6		38.2		33.4		36.7		37.9	
2011	42.0		37.9		38.4		34.9		39.4	

<sup>a</sup>Calculated based on low-status occupations (ISCO classification: occupational groups 5–9) from all people who answered the occupation question in 1989; unemployed not included as unemployment was close to 0

<sup>b</sup>Calculated based on low-status occupations (ISCO 5–9) from working-age people (18–64) in 2000 and 2011 Census; unemployed included in 2000 and 2011  
Source Estonian Censuses 1989, 2000, 2011



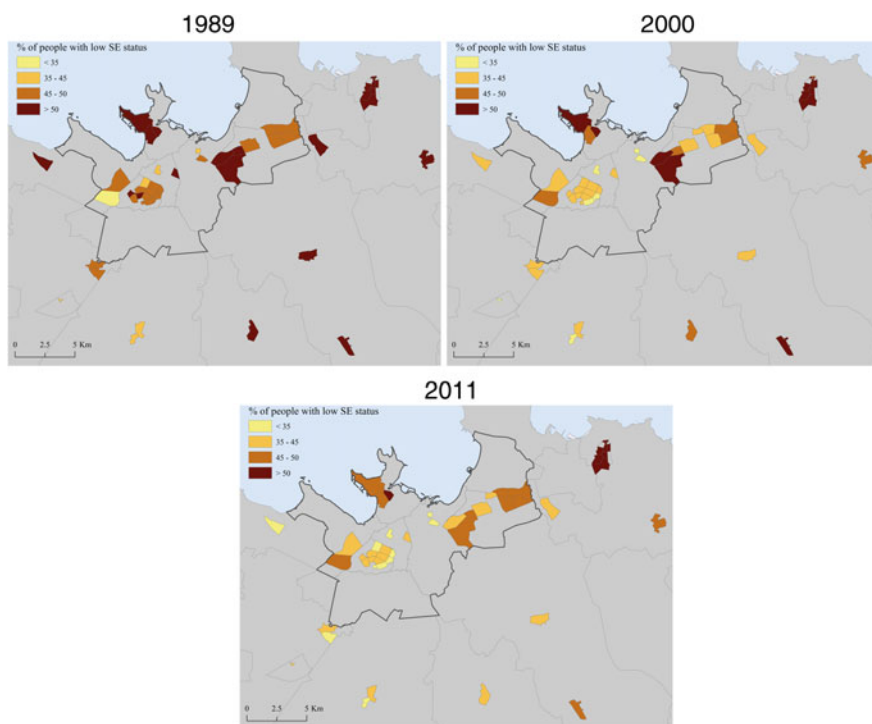
**Fig. 17.3** Mean age of population living in housing estates in the Tallinn urban region, 1989, 2000, 2011. *Data Source* Estonian Censuses

In 1989, more than half the working-age population of the urban region worked in lower level positions (Table 17.2). In general, in housing estate neighbourhoods the share of people with low socio-economic status was slightly smaller than in other neighbourhoods (for example, 50% in urban housing estates compared to 55% in other urban neighbourhoods). In line with former studies (Tammara and Leetmaa 2007), our study confirmed that the proportion of people working in low-status jobs was higher in the surrounding municipalities than in the city in 1989 (59% in housing estates and 66% in other suburban neighbourhoods). The occupational structure changed after the collapse of the Soviet economy and, therefore, the proportion of people working in ISCO 5–9 occupations had fallen everywhere in the region by the end of the first transition decade (2000). At the same time, the position of housing estates and other neighbourhoods were reversed—now the share of lower status occupational groups was higher in housing estates.

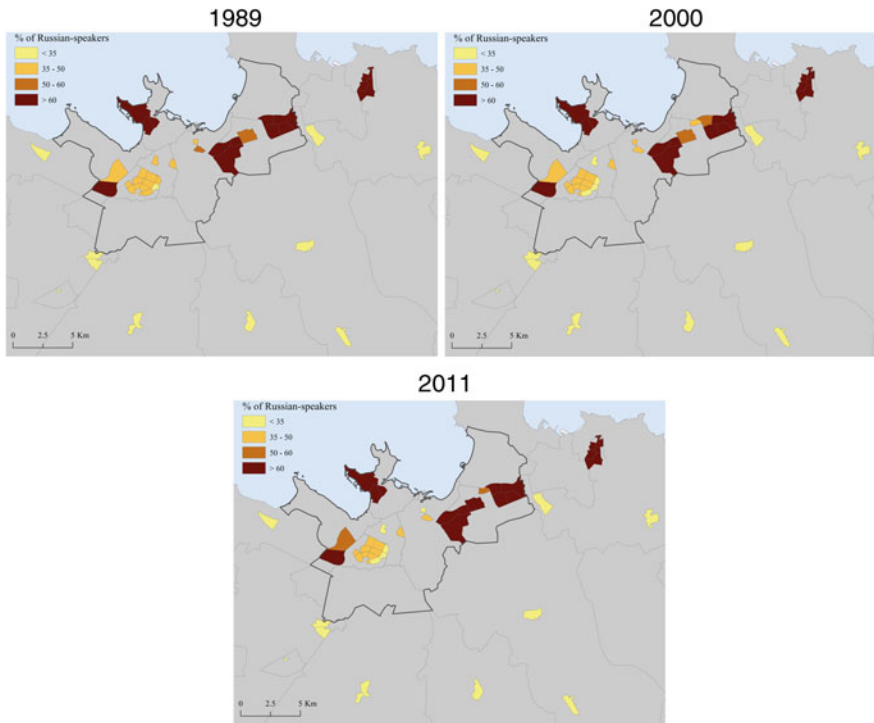
Comparing different housing estates in the agglomeration (Fig. 17.4), the highest proportion of people working in low-status occupations in 1989 were in older housing estate districts in Northern Tallinn, some Lasnamäe neighbourhoods, housing estates in Maardu, and most of the rural housing estates (since agricultural jobs were included in the low-status categories). By 2000, Mustamäe and Väike-

Õismäe, with the exception of Astangu (an extension of Väike-Õismäe built in the 1980s, which lost its initial high-status position during the transition decades), had improved their overall socio-economic positions, despite the high proportion of older inhabitants in these districts. Today, Mustamäe's attractiveness is influenced by the Tallinn Technical University campus, which is located in the district. Public and private investments into services and recreation facilities around Väike-Õismäe have been extensive, and this also has an effect on the attractiveness of socialist-era housing. Housing estates in suburban municipalities are today more heterogeneous than they were in the late Soviet years, whereas in housing estates in Maardu the proportion of low-status population was the highest in the region in 2011 (Fig. 17.4).

Although correlation between occupational differentiation and ethnic segregation was already observable at the end of the 1980s, by the 2000s ethnic and socio-economic segregation patterns clearly overlapped in the Tallinn urban region (Tammaru et al. 2016). While immigrants were prioritised in the Soviet housing allocation schemes, during the transition years it was Estonians who benefited from



**Fig. 17.4** Proportion of inhabitants with low socio-economic status\* living in housing estates in the Tallinn urban region, 1989, 2000, 2011. \*Proportion of people working in low-status occupations (ISCO 5-9) of the working-age (18–64) population. In 2000 and 2011, unemployed people are included also; in 1989, unemployment was almost 0. Data Source Estonian Censuses



**Fig. 17.5** Proportion of Russian-speakers in housing estates in the Tallinn urban region 1989, 2000, 2011. *Data Source* Estonian Censuses

social and economic transformations. As a result, Estonians were probably more able to improve their living conditions. Meanwhile, the reputation of different urban districts changed too. People could stay in the same neighbourhoods where they received their apartments years ago, but they now found themselves living in a low-image neighbourhood. Because it was Russian-speakers who mostly inhabited housing estates, it was their residential environments that suffered the most from worsened neighbourhood reputations.

On average, 56% of the residents of urban housing estates were Russian-speakers in 1989 (Table 17.2, Fig. 17.5). In residential districts built in the last Soviet decade, for example, Lasnamäe and Astangu, the proportion of Russian-speakers were even higher, since immigration during their construction period was extremely intensive. Many Russians, especially low-skilled industrial workers, inhabited Northern Tallinn's older housing estate neighbourhoods. Our analysis shows that despite the fact that the average proportion of Russian-speakers in the metropolitan population decreased in the early 1990s (many Russian-speakers, including those in the army, returned to Russia and other former Soviet republics), the housing estates of Tallinn became even more Russian—by 2011 the share of Russian-speakers in urban housing estate neighbourhoods

reached 59% on average. The satellite town Maardu seems to represent the case of hyper-segregation. Whilst in the city, the housing estate neighbourhoods were mixed, in Maardu's housing estates the proportion of Russian-speakers was already close to 80% in 1989, and in 2000 and 2011 this proportion continued to increase. Because rural housing estates were the destination of native Estonians in the 1970s and 1980s, the proportion of Russian-speakers remained mostly below 10 per cent there in 1989 as well as later on.

We can conclude that in general in the Tallinn urban region, the modernist neighbourhoods of the Soviet era have gradually lost their attractive status. This finding differs from the argument that post-socialist housing estates have experienced relative social stability (Kährik and Tammaru 2010). As discussed in former research (Temelová et al. 2011), we also find that an obvious differentiation occurs among housing estate neighbourhoods within the same urban region: the speed of ageing and social degradation varies and some housing estates have managed to preserve their appeal more than the others.

## **17.5 Key Contemporary Challenges: Acknowledging Social Degradation and Combating Stigmatisation**

Considering that the speed with which new dwellings are constructed remains insufficient to replace housing estate apartments as a prevailing dwelling type in the region, the main challenge today is to preserve the social stability of housing estate neighbourhoods. Interestingly, although there is plenty of publicly discussed evidence (Leetmaa 2017; Tammaru et al. 2016) that the relative position of housing estates is weakening, and the interviewed experts were in general aware of the ageing process and selective in- and out-migration taking place, none of them explicitly acknowledged that the increase in segregation is a huge problem. They emphasised, on the contrary, that the living conditions in housing estates are constantly improving—the majority of the electorate lives in housing estate districts and, therefore, much investment is directed to these areas. It was pointed out that housing estate districts serve as the main 'migration pump' for the city; people first enter these districts and move on later when their family and professional career develops. Housing estate apartments are a vital and affordable choice for the student renters or a 'springboard' for young families. There is also evidence that new immigrants who arrive in Estonia from the former Soviet countries today tend to settle in housing estates (Leetmaa 2017).

Interviewees also unanimously condemned public discussions that stigmatise living in housing estate neighbourhoods—an additional challenge that housing estates are facing today. They were of the view that 'no objective arguments' exist to prove that housing estates are losing their value. Rather, they defended the living environment in housing estates with the arguments that all necessary services are at

hand in these neighbourhoods, and the connections to the rest of the city are good too. Even though the fears of these experts regarding unfair stigmatisation are justified, a situation in which the proven signs of social degradation are not acknowledged is also somewhat alarming.

## **17.6 Urban Policies Related to Housing Estate Neighbourhoods in the Tallinn Urban Region**

Because public expenditure was generally limited in Eastern and Central European countries after the change of system, it is to be expected that housing estate related policies remained underfinanced too, certainly compared to the generous Soviet state, but also in comparison to the ambitious urban and housing policies of Western and Northern European countries. The passive position of public bodies was, however, characteristic not only of the early transition years. Even later on, no clear vision existed for the future role of housing estates in the housing market. It is occasionally argued that housing estates have been ignored by public policies in the post-socialist period. We argue also that neglect has been an active policy choice with both expected and unexpected effects. We first introduce the institutional rearrangements of the 1990s that have determined the path of housing estates in subsequent years. This is followed by a summary of actions undertaken by the public, private and non-profit sectors in the 2000s and 2010s in housing estates.

### ***17.6.1 Privatisation of Housing Estate Apartments in the 1990s***

Without any doubt, the most influential post-socialist public intervention has been the decision to privatise housing estate apartments. At the beginning of the 1990s, nobody was yet able to foresee the consequences of privatisation. New plans were even developed to learn from contemporary Finnish housing construction models and to build more human-scale, but still master-planned, residential districts to address the persisting housing shortage. Ownership reform was implemented in the early 1990s, dwellings that had been built in the Soviet years were sold under favourable terms to sitting tenants and pre-World War II housing was restituted. By 2000, the vast majority of dwellings (98%) in the Tallinn urban region were already in private hands. A high rate of home ownership was considered a cornerstone of the market economy in the 1990s. Today, many experts admit retrospectively that an excessive burden was placed on individual apartment owners and that the new housing management system was applied within too short a period.

When compared to housing estates in many Western cities, it is obvious that opportunities for urban renewal are inevitably different in a fully privatised society

where the preferences and rights of single owners need to be coordinated. Urban land was also almost entirely privatised, giving the strategic power over new housing and commercial projects to private developers. At the same time, local governments were left with only limited options when deciding the location of social housing or public facilities.

### ***17.6.2 Building the System of Apartment Associations***

The formation of apartment associations (non-profit organisations that collect contributions and organise the maintenance and renovation of apartment buildings) since the late 1990s has brought new order into the initial chaos in housing management. This new system was initially confusing. For example, the size of the plot that the apartment associations privatised around the buildings varied: some apartment associations privatised large plots and later had difficulty in caring for them, others privatised only a few metres around the buildings, optimising their budget initially, but later limiting their influence over their residential environment. In 1996, an umbrella organisation, the Estonian Union of Apartment Associations (EUAA) was founded with the mission of training the leaders of apartment associations. Apartment association leaders had been found among local residents, who as a rule had limited administrative skills and only vague legal knowledge. Together with the Tallinn City Government, the EUAA has organised roundtable discussions, seminars and training for apartment association leaders (accounting, leadership, cooperation and legislation) both in Estonian and in Russian.

Today, apartment associations are considered the main citizen-level partners for the city government in relation to housing estates. For example, in a rather anonymous residential environment such as a housing estate, classical neighbourhood associations formed from the bottom up are a rare phenomenon (Holvandus and Leetmaa 2016). Apartment associations, although they must be non-profit organisations, have partly taken over this role. By renovating the buildings and tidying the adjacent private and semi-public spaces around houses, they raise the value of local living environments. The success of a particular block often depends on the skills and capabilities of apartment associations leaders. If the apartment association directorate manages to motivate homeowners to invest and is administratively able to communicate with its partners successfully (city officials, lending institutions) the respective blocks tend to be in better condition. Yet, there is no scheme to allow apartment associations to take responsibility in more general spatial planning issues, e.g. how to develop the public space around apartment blocks (in the so-called no man's land) or how to adjust infrastructure to the changing needs of housing estate districts.

### ***17.6.3 New Approaches in Urban Planning***

The social context of spatial planning has also undergone thorough changes. Socialist master plans for the larger housing estate districts of Tallinn were created in the 1960s and 1970s. Both the Soviet austerity policy and technological development (e.g. car ownership) very soon made it necessary to update these initial plans with official Revision Plans. Compromises were often made in relation to pedestrian comfort, recreational opportunities, personal services and sometimes also in public transport, but schools and kindergartens were mostly completed as planned. In reality, the Soviet period ended before the revisions were fully implemented. As a result, even though new apartments were desirable residential destinations, the housing estate neighbourhoods of the late Soviet period tended to have an incomplete feel.

The 1990s witnessed a planning vacuum. The old planning system became morally discredited and uncertainty prevailed, especially with regard to which aspects of old general plans should be followed. The main locational principles (location of social infrastructure, service centres and transport corridors) were not questioned, but there was limited public expenditure so it was often not possible to build something according to the plans. The planned volume of residential construction was ignored too—neither state nor private developers were able to invest in housing. New contemporary master plans were developed for the whole city and also for the housing estate districts in the 2000s. Now the realisation of plans was not as direct as under the central planning system. New master plans defined the zones of building rights and determined general spatial principles (guidelines for densification, location of new objects). Because urban land was now mostly in private hands, the role of the city government was limited to balancing private and public interests. From the perspective of public representatives, private developers never wanted to keep their public obligations (to create public spaces or reserve land for public functions, for example) and private developers, in turn, complained that the contemporary planning system did not give them stability and that they always ran the risk of the municipality setting unreasonable requirements for their projects.

The investment capacity of the public sector increased in parallel with rises in living standards. The city government gradually started to complement the unfinished infrastructure of the housing estates: building medical centres and sport facilities, renovating schools and kindergartens, reconstructing parks and green areas and improving streets and public transport. Private developers invested in shopping malls and service centres. As a result, the housing estate districts now became relatively better equipped with services and infrastructure. Nevertheless, some miscalculations were made too. The city sold former public facilities and land, even when it would have been more reasonable to keep them for future public purposes. In a privatised society, municipalities also behaved as market actors by reducing expenditures related to unused buildings and earning money by selling them. New shopping malls were placed next to major arterial streets, providing



access to cars rather than to pedestrians and public transport users. This even caused closures of former *mikrorayon* service centres; thus, the proximity and accessibility that were original benefits of housing estate areas suffered as a result (Hess 2018).

Since the 2010s, interest has again grown in finding new planning solutions for housing estates. It seems, however, that interest in larger spatial scales ended with the socialist period. Contemporary planning thought is more focused on smaller spatial scales. Younger architects and other young urbanists engage themselves in redesigning public areas in housing estates by converting former anonymous space between the buildings into places with a more human scale. Although these small and rather low-cost interventions do not propose comprehensive new visions for housing estates, they enable experimentation with new good practices that could be applied more widely later on.

#### ***17.6.4 Municipal and National Initiatives for Housing Renovation***

New housing construction was almost non-existent in the 1990s and housing renovation was limited to minor repair works of single households. By the 2000s, the economy had recovered, financial institutions were interested in offering loans, and incomes of households and investment capabilities of municipalities had recovered. More active apartment associations now started to apply for funding from commercial banks to finance their first larger scale renovation works. Tallinn City Government developed a more active position as well. Under the municipal programme ‘Repair the façade’ associations were given the opportunity to apply for municipal co-funding for making their building more energy efficient or improving its external appearance. Another municipal funding scheme ‘Tidy up the yard’ supported efforts to revitalise the common spaces between buildings. In addition, the city government has taken on the obligation to maintain (mowing the lawn, snow clearing) larger public spaces between the blocks that have not been privatised by apartment associations. Although these measures are still insufficient in the context of the huge revitalisation needed in physically ageing housing estates, they certainly help to build a responsible homeowners’ community.

Since the end of the 2000s, major renovation works in housing estate neighbourhoods have been carried out with state subsidies mediated through a special funding agency, KredEx. The agency provides financial support for housing renovation projects when a complete renovation project exists for the building and when considerable improvement in energy efficiency is expected (Fig. 17.6). Apartment associations usually apply for KredEx funding in parallel with taking out mortgages from commercial banks. This support scheme, therefore, functions competitively. Banks only approve loans to projects that seem as if they will be able to pay back the mortgage. Also, the application process requires that apartment association leaders have considerable administrative capacities. As a result,

better-managed blocks, often concentrated spatially in better urban districts, benefit. For example, the distribution of KredEx-supported projects in Tallinn reveals that relatively fewer renovation projects are located in Lasnamäe (Hess et al. 2018). Still, KredEx-renovated projects balance negative views that question whether the technical condition of housing estate buildings allows them to be renovated systematically. In fact, several analyses made by building experts have confirmed that competent renovation could keep the houses in a good condition for a very long period (Tallinn Technical University 2009). Municipal care of public spaces and national funding for renovating buildings, in combination, have visibly improved the technical state and aesthetic look of housing estates in the Tallinn urban region.

### ***17.6.5 Public and Private Actors in New Housing Construction in Housing Estates***

Privatisation created a society of homeowners. Until today, in many Estonian cities, the construction of social housing was a taboo topic as there were other priorities in which municipalities preferred to invest. The Tallinn urban region is the only region in Estonia where the municipalities enjoy population growth and considerable increases in budgets; therefore, the investment capacity of municipalities is also greater here. Since the second half of the 2000s, the Tallinn City Government has



**Fig. 17.6** Apartment building after undergoing KredEx-funded renovations on the left vs. an unrenovated apartment building on the right. *Source* Annika Väiko

been a pioneer in contemporary construction of social housing, also sometimes attracting condemnation for turning back the clock by intervening in the market.

The first target groups for municipal housing were socially less secure groups and residents who had to find new homes after leaving restituted houses (often older people). Even though political opinions vary over whether or not building new social housing is sound urban policy, the most criticised aspect of the construction of social housing in Tallinn has been related to the choices of location (Kährik and Kõre 2013). Initially, several social housing projects were located in Northern Tallinn, a district where the proportion of people with low social status has traditionally been high. Recently, larger groups of social housing have been erected in Lasnamäe (e.g. the Raadiku and Meeliku neighbourhoods). Given that social housing itself is a stigmatised institution in the post-socialist ultraliberal society, there is always a risk that local residents will block the implementation of these projects. Locating these projects in Lasnamäe was partly related to the fact that the city owned appropriate plots there. In addition, in housing estate districts, community movements are typically weaker and the risk that such projects would be resisted in these districts is small. At the same time, placing social housing projects in districts that already suffer social degradation amplifies the moral downgrade of that residential environment even more.

Another problem is that as the stock of social housing is still very small, and the city has not been able to separate target groups with different needs: former prisoners, young adults leaving orphanages, people with specific medical needs (groups that may need an assisted living service), elderly people originating from restituted houses, large families and others. The concentration of less fortunate people as well as people from very different backgrounds in social housing fosters social conflict and misunderstandings. Criticisms have also been made that so far no good management models exist for social housing (TTÜ and TEMA 2008): there are neither typical apartment associations where homeowners can make their voice heard nor are there any other tools that inhabitants can use to influence their residential environment.

In the 2010s, the city of Tallinn has extended the construction of municipal housing for groups of various valued specialists in the city (nurses, teachers) whose low salary does not enable them to enter the housing market. The initial projects in Lasnamäe and Mustamäe have attracted rather positive feedback, although doubt still exists today regarding whether intervention should be made in the free market.

Contrary to new municipal housing projects in housing estate districts, private developers target more affluent residents. These developers take the view that although Soviet-era residential buildings are out-of-date from the perspective of existing infrastructure (plans of apartments, design of common spaces within and outside buildings) housing estates are still relatively good locations for new apartment houses. The new residents are expected to come from older housing estate apartments; for example, younger residents starting their housing career. The Russian community is extensive, therefore, in some cases, developers borrow ideas from new projects in Moscow or St. Petersburg that are well known in the local Russian community via Russian media channels. The new housing projects in



**Fig. 17.7** An example of in-fill development in Astangu housing estate, Tallinn. *Source* Johanna Holvandus

housing estate districts are price-sensitive since on the one hand, they need to act as alternatives to old housing estate apartments and on the other hand, they need to discourage residents leaving the district. While this type of densification stabilises housing estate districts socio-economically, it creates micro-scale segregation. Developers sell the surrounding environment (shops, kindergartens, public transport) in addition to the new apartments themselves but at the same time tend to add some of the elements of gated communities to their projects (Fig. 17.7).

### ***17.6.6 Rising Community Activism in Housing Estate Neighbourhoods***

Although generally housing estates are not considered to be favourable contexts for community activism, recently an inspirational flagship movement, the Lasna-idea, has been initiated in Lasnamäe. The first activities of the Lasna-idea were launched in 2014. As of 2015, the Lasna-idea is a non-profit organisation aiming to bring together citizens, local government, and civil and business organisations under the common goal of building a better living environment in the district. The leaders of the movement are mostly young educated people or those interested in fields related



**Fig. 17.8** Lasna-idea workshop, ‘Area-based community’. *Source* Janek Jõgisäär

to urban space. The first goal of the initiative was to change the image of Lasnamäe for both residents and outsiders. The main actions have been to organise different events (picnics, outdoor cinemas), workshops and public forums to bring together locals, both Estonian and Russian, but also to invest in place-making by organising something inspiring in otherwise grey and boring public spaces.

Today, Lasna-idea has gathered notable experience in networking with residents and other local actors. They seek to engage themselves in issues of planning and designing public space, and training people who have ideas regarding the living environment. Because collaboration with local government has been good, they plan to coordinate workshops and training courses to inspire people to take action themselves, rather than to expect everything to be done for them. One of their most interesting missions to date is the year-long project of community building in Raadiku social housing neighbourhoods, where the owner Raadiku Development Ltd. has invited the Lasna-idea people to organise workshops and activities that create a sense of belonging and ownership among the inhabitants (Fig. 17.8).

There are other civil initiatives in housing estates, for example, an initiative named Lasna-front mostly deals with cleanup issues, some housing estate districts have Facebook pages, and in the Haabersti district (which includes Väike-Õismäe) a Roundtable of the Haabersti Apartment Association (a non-governmental organisation) has been formed. Interesting place marketing efforts are being made by journalists, e.g. editing journal tabs on the history (including pre-socialist era) of housing estate districts. As such, civil initiatives try to counteract the stigmatisation of housing estates and to increase residential satisfaction.

## 17.7 Conclusion

As in many other post-socialist cities, the housing estates of the Tallinn urban region form a remarkable segment of almost fully privatised housing stock. At the same time, similar to other ethnically diverse European cities, post-Soviet housing estates tend to have a mixed-ethnic nature. Our study revealed that in these circumstances housing estates in Tallinn are facing gradual ageing and social degradation. Among the housing estate neighbourhoods of Tallinn, some are suffering from serious social decline, whereas others have preserved their status relatively well. Much of this is dependent on when and how these estates were built. The older Mustamäe district is greener and more finished than the magnificently planned but unfinished Lasnamäe. Väike-Õismäe benefits even today from its carefully planned infrastructure. Some housing estates house a low-skilled industrial workforce who suffered the most from the economic transition. It is hard to argue to what extent contemporary interventions could redirect these path-dependent trajectories.

Two types of interventions can be recognised in the post-socialist period. First, in the 1990s major institutional rearrangements—privatisation, new planning principles, the formation of apartment associations—were launched. Other than this, a ‘wait-and-see’ (or ‘neglect’) period lasted until the late 2000s. Since then, new experiments have been initiated, e.g. municipal funding to improve facades and yards, national energy policy measures, municipal social housing projects and new private housing construction. In the 2010s, an increasingly younger generation of urban experts have engaged themselves in landscaping the public spaces of housing estates. Very possibly, we will see the effects of these latter efforts over the next few decades. However, the results of former research on targeted urban revitalisation policies are contradictory. For example, designating certain neighbourhoods as problem areas may even harm the reputation of whole districts (like Urban Sensitive Zones in Paris: Sari 2012). More powerful public interventions may indeed increase residential satisfaction (like in Leipzig/Grünau) but the reputation of housing estates largely depends on the availability of other residential alternatives in regional housing markets (Kovács and Herfert 2012). Therefore, even though no larger common vision exists in the Tallinn urban region regarding how these recent actions might stabilise housing estates, these undertakings could potentially at least increase the satisfaction of local residents.

The Tallinn experience proves that interventions, e.g. new housing construction that densifies housing estates, may both improve and damage the reputation of housing estates. Even when private developers distance themselves from the Soviet image of housing estates and at the same time use socialist residential benefits to their advantage, they still diversify dwelling types in these districts and potentially improve the image of the areas. The current problem that social housing projects face is the low reputation of social housing per se. This situation can only change when more population groups have access to affordable municipal apartments in the future and/or better management models for public rental houses are elaborated.

A challenge for future policies is to find a balance between policies related to buildings and policies related to people. A good example of how emerging communities of homeowners can be empowered is the efforts of the Estonian Union of Apartment Association to invest in the capabilities of apartment associations. Associations that function as professional housing management agencies have also been more successful in applying for funding for housing improvement. Remarkable initiatives for people-based policies have originated in the non-profit sector. The non-governmental organisation Lasna-idea, has been able to support local inhabitants to become more responsible for their surroundings and offer more professional partnerships to the municipality and private developers.

Interestingly, there is no common conviction among contemporary urban actors that housing estates are truly losing their social status. It seems that this also hinders the creation of common visions regarding how to keep this large segment of housing stock stable in the future. However, taking into account that the challenges related to housing estates are today almost synonymous with general housing issues in many post-socialist cities, it seems that more ambitious and better-integrated policies are needed.

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