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Housing Justice with the Capability Approach

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Abstract

The paper explores the connections between social justice and housing policy, with a focus on the capability approach account of social justice. Increasing awareness of inequality problems in housing raises the very foundational question ‘inequality of what in housing?’ This question demands to clarify which object of distribution – a metric of social justice – is appropriate, and whether our concern is about inequality or actually about inequity. These foundational questions are related to competing principles of social justice in political philosophy. The paper explores these questions in relation to housing policy from the capability perspective. The capability approach suggests the *capabilities* of a person as a proper metric of justice instead of *resources* or *utility* that other competing principles of justice propose. The approach clearly defines which information we should look into for evaluating whether one state of affairs is less or more just than another. However, it does not provide a specific theory of justice, and thus keeps open to various capability theories of justice. Therefore, bringing the capability approach to housing policy and justice matter requires an intermediate step of: (i) clarifying what elements other than ‘metric’ of justice should be taken into account for discussing justice-enhancing housing policy in association with *capabilities*; and (ii) connecting conceptual vocabulary of the approach and of housing policy research, by exploring connections with theoretical concepts in social theories that housing research has adopted. The paper explores these two topics. It mainly bases on Sen’s approach to justice – comparative approach – amongst other capability theories of justice. Connecting social justice, the capability approach, and housing policy research will require continuous and collective interdisciplinary discussions. This paper aims to contribute to this process from a housing policy researcher’s perspective.

Keywords: housing policy, justice, inequality, capability approach