

# WORKSHOP No. 26 | HOUSING AND SOCIAL THEORY

## Moving beyond state incapacity and state-socialism in Central and Eastern European housing theory

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### **Abstract**

The most common and important reference point in most contemporary housing theories seeking to conceptualise Central and Eastern European (CEE) housing system(s) is what the paper calls the “state incapacity thesis”, understanding housing developments in the region, striving to catch up with the “developed” world, as shaped by the incapacity of the post-state-socialist state to regulate the housing market, newly emerging after the collapse of the peculiar state-socialist housing system. Although the dangers of a developmentalist approach to analysing the post-state-socialist development of the region and the ignorance of pre-state-socialist housing development were already pointed out by researchers earlier, this critique was addressed largely by the acceptance of the existence of some intra-regional variation in the concept, but not its overhaul.

The paper suggests theoretical endeavours pay more attention to the structural forces determining the region’s position in the world economy. Through the examples of self-build and allocation practices of public rental dwellings in Hungary in the 20th century, it is demonstrated that from such new perspective, notions such as the significant role of the family in housing access and housing redistribution more significantly targeting upper classes largely assigned to the (post-)state-socialist state’s incapacity by its students were actually characteristic of Hungary’s housing system already before the Second World War. With the help of Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, such developments can be re-evaluated as constitutive elements of a semiperipheral housing system, and not necessarily caused solely by internal contradictions of a unique state-controlled housing system or its haunting legacy.

**Keywords:** housing system, state incapacity, semiperiphery