

# Future of Housing - The Enabling State

Client: Royal Academy of Arts

5th studio were invited to be a part of the Royal Academy's 2015 Future of Housing season. Our proposal investigated the potential of an enabling state to respond to the delivery of housing and infrastructure with joined up thinking. The illustration and narrative have since been re-exhibited at the Rotterdam Architecture Biennale and published in Bauwelt, Germany's leading journal on Urban Planning

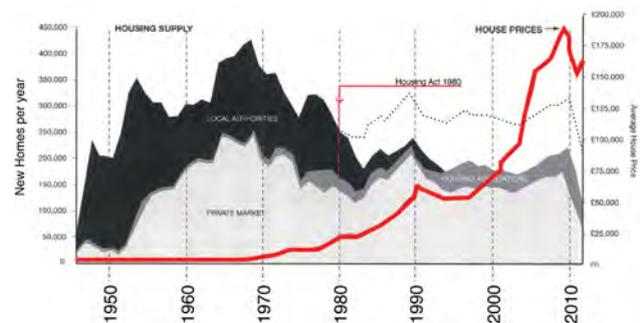


This is an illustration of how good government - the enabling state - can play a major part in the creation of a beautiful & responsive place. Housing is considered as part of the collective investment in a city built around public infrastructure, acting as an armature

We believe that housing should be considered in relation to broader cultural issues, micro-economies and the connection to work, energy production, landscape, education and training. Housing conceived in isolation has too often resulted in the development of ugly monocultures.

The last few decades have witnessed the dissolution of the state as a builder of housing. This has been paralleled by the sale of public utilities – water, electricity, gas, communications and the railways – once the spatial instruments of state.

What might an alternative look like? In Holland, for instance, the state plays an enabling role in housing development. It assembles land and lays out infrastructure, with sites then parceled up for developers to build on, sharing risk, costs and profits in a more equitable way.



Above This diagram illustrates the failure of the private sector to fill the gap in housing provision caused by ending public sector delivery of housing following the 1980 Housing Act. This demonstrates that the involvement of the state as developer is critical to address the supply of housing, and the growing disparity between rich and poor in a country where land has become the primary asset.



Using a similar partnership model, what could happen if one took East Anglia, the area of the UK most subject to growth, and re-purposed the former 'instruments of the state' to enable bottom-up development? Travelling on East Anglia's slow trains one passes hundreds of forgotten tracts of land around towns that have suffered decades of neglect. Rather than use more land, we see these underutilised and wasteful railway connections as a key network for enabling state investment.

For our proposal, we have taken a random transect across the region from Wisbech in the Fens to Harwich on the Essex coast. Each town will require its own particular approach. Here, we have focused on Harwich. Inspired by Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco series The Allegory of Good and Bad Government in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, we have proposed nine tenets for the 'enabling state' that we see as the apogee of good government.



Top Harwich reborn  
Above A section through the city shows the superimposition of programme, creating a condensed urban platform.