



SOCIAL RENTAL AGENCIES IN FLANDERS, BELGIUM

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Some data

Structure of the Flemish housing market

	share				
	1981	1991	2001	2005	2013
Owner occupiers	65.6	68.9	72.6	74	70,5
Tenants	32.6	29.5	25.8	24.1	27,1
private			20.5	18.5	20,4
social			5.3	5.6	6,7
Free housing	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.6	2,4

= +/- 550,000 households

What is a SRA?

SRA's are

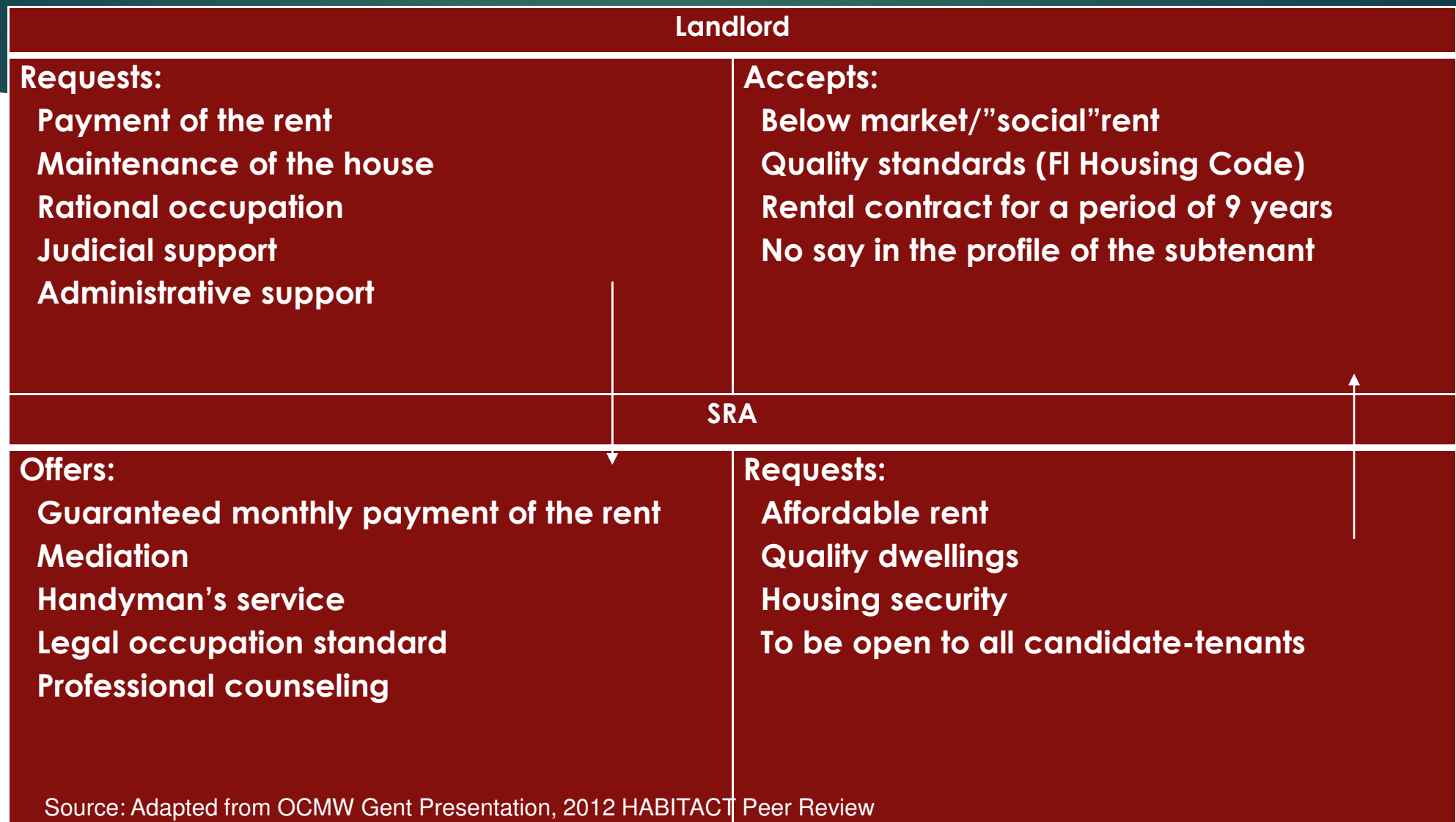
- ▶ non-profit or local authority organisations...
- ▶ ...dealing with housing problems of poor & vulnerable people
- ▶ ...rooted in services dealing with the homeless persons
- ▶ **tendency**: organised by local social services and recently even by a local government

... rent from **private landlords** and sublet to tenants

- ▶ securing the payment of the rent (even in periods of vacancy)
- ▶ securing housing quality
- ▶ offer an affordable rent to the subtenant
- ▶ organising (social) support if necessary

Partnership model: between landlords, tenants & government(s)

Overview of the partnership between a SRA and Landlord



Overview of the relationship a **SRA and its tenants**

SRA Tenant

Requests:

- Appropriate accommodation
- Affordable rent
- Security of tenure
- Support

Agrees to provide:

- Participation in rental counselling
- Maintenance of the house/good behavior
- Prompt payment
- Open communication

SRA

Offers:

- High-quality housing
- "Social"/affordable rent
- Rental subsidy (Flemish government)
- 9-year rental agreement
- Rental counselling

Agrees to provide:

- Professional counselor
- For support: link to welfare services
- Follow-up of the rent
- Mediation in case of arrears
- General assistance with enquiries etc

Source: Adapted from OCMW Gent Presentation, 2012 HABITACT Peer Review

Partners - institutional organisation

- ▶ **Private/ngo SRAs**
- ▶ **Local social services SRAs**
 - field workers
- ▶ **(Local authorities being the 'director' of housing policies)**
 - (re)fined allocation rules
- ▶ **Flemish government**
 - recognition & financing (staff & working)
 - allocation rules
 - quality criteria
 - some renovation subsidies
 - private rental legislation since 1/1/2015 →no impact so far
- ▶ **(Federal government)**
 - some renovation subsidies
 - private rental legislation prior to 1/1/2015

Roots

- **End of the 1970s**
- **Welfare work 'invades' the housing market**
 - discrimination of labour workers (esp labour migrants)
 - (non official) housing crisis around 1980
 - de-institutionisation of 'institutions'
 - homeless services looking for housing for their clients

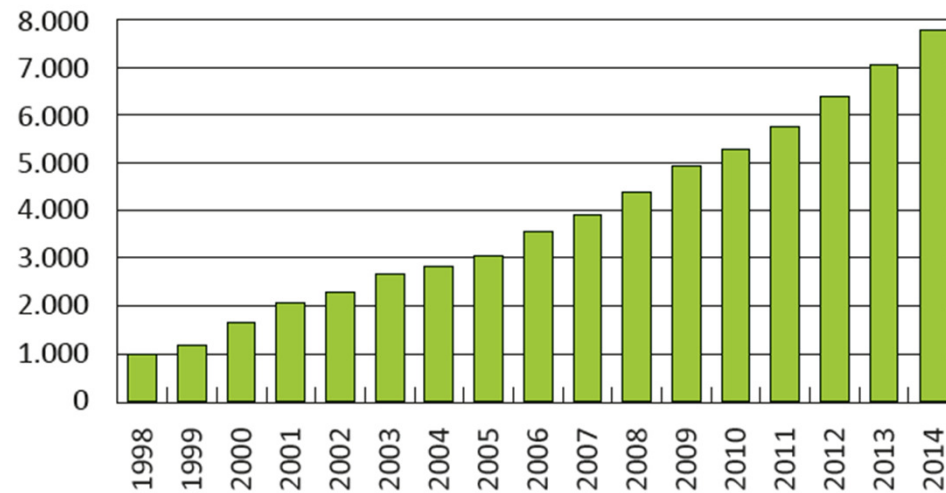
Milestones

- ▶ 1985: conference **introducing** the method to the public
- ▶ 1993: **foundation** of VOB, umbrella organisation of 'new housing initiatives'
- ▶ 1993: **experiments** of the Flemish government supporting...
 - ▶ 9 local SRAs
 - ▶ VOB
- ▶ 1997: Initiatives for tenants (VOB, SRAs, tenants' organisations) are inscribed in the **Flemish housing law**

State of affairs

5.44 Evolutie SVK-woningen

Evolutie van het aantal woningen in het beheer van de erkende en gesubsidieerde verhuurkantoren, van 1998 tot 2014.



Bron: VMSW.

Number of dwellings

-End 2014: 7,792

-80% of the municipalities

-Average number of dwellings per SRA rose from 54.8 in 1999, to 96.3 in 2009 –

-Largest SRA (Kortrijk): +500 dwellings

State of affairs

- **Work/income situation** new tenants, 2009, %
 - unemployed 17.6
 - subsistence income **34.3**
 - part-time job 0.7
 - disability/illness
 - in work **19.4**
 - pension 3.2
 - other 5
 - no info 9.3

State of affairs

- ▶ **33% were homeless** at the moment of allocation

Homeless= living in a caravan, uninhabitable dwelling, living on the street, living in a service for homeless persons

Social basis 'seems' solid

- political support in policy notes of political parties & policy notes of ministers and aldermen
- support from the representative organisation of landlords
- high satisfaction on landlords working with SRAs (research!)
- **But:** difficult to enter the 'crowded' housing field that is confronted with huge waiting lists → ongoing fight for money

Pitfalls

- ▶ Context of scarcity → **caseload is huge** → pressure on the staff → high turnover
- ▶ Debates
 - ▶ SRA-non-profit-**private**-style (non professional?) vs. SRA embedded in **local social** service (bureaucratisation?)
 - ▶ SRA as **housing providers** vs. SRA as **welfare institution**
 - ▶ if acting as w.i. → risk of arrears (soft approach)
 - ▶ Scale: too small? (managing staff; dealing with subsidies)
 - ▶ Finding houses

Further reading

- ▶ De Decker, P. (2002): On the rise of social rental agencies in Belgium, in: **Urban Studies**, vol. 39, nr. 2, p. 297-326.
- ▶ De Decker, P. (2009): Social rental agencies : still a splendid idea?, in: **European Journal of Homelessness**, vol 3, December, p. 217-232.
- ▶ Feantsa Office (2012): **Social rental agencies: an innovative housing-led response to homelessness**