



# SOCIAL RENTAL AGENCIES IN FLANDERS, BELGIUM

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PRAGUE – 24 NOV 2015

## Some data

### Structure of the Flemish housing market

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

= +/- 550,000 households

# What is a SRA?

## SRA's are

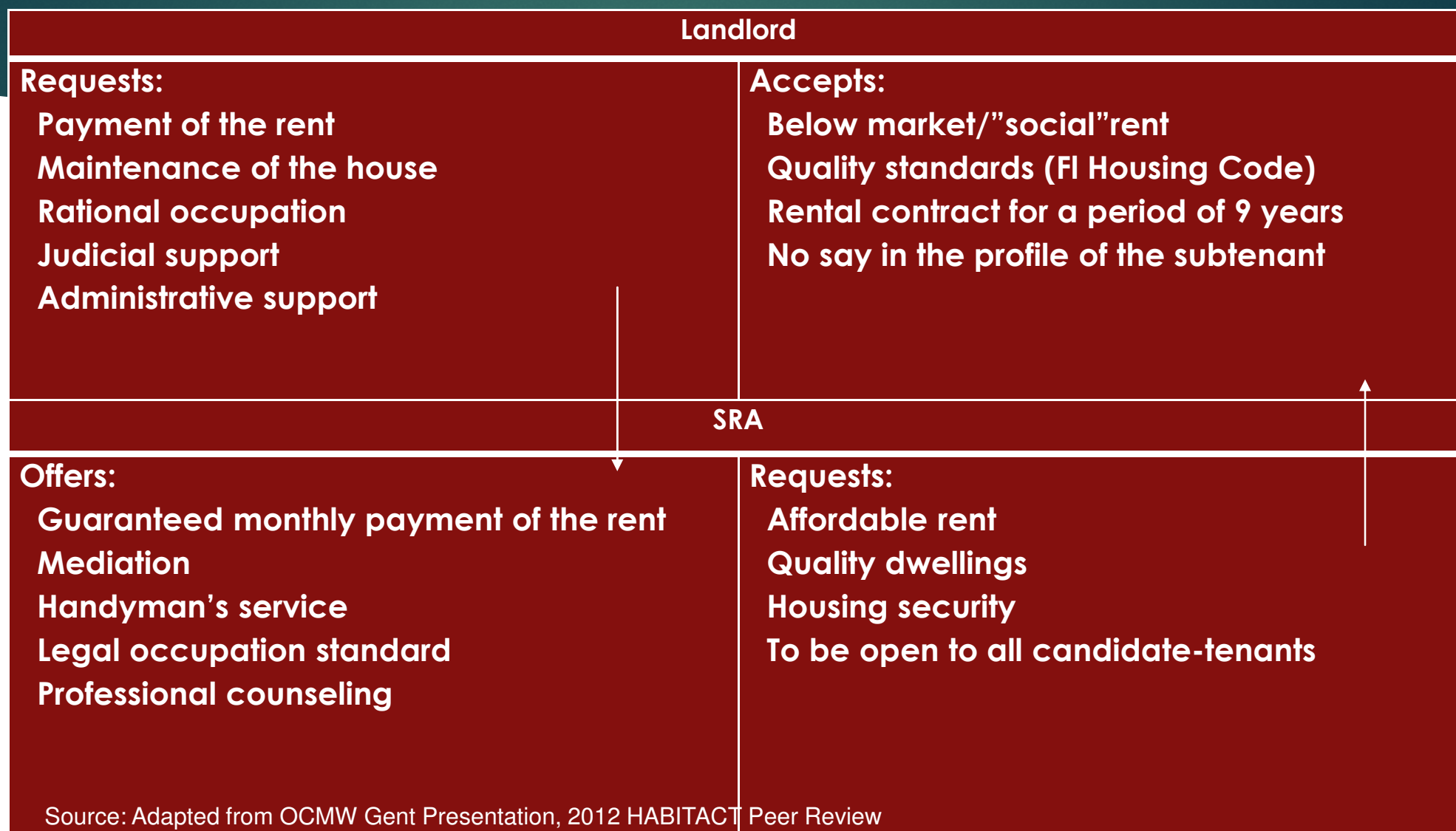
- ▶ non-profit or local authority organisations...
- ▶ ...dealing with housing problems of poor & vulnerable people
- ▶ ...rooted in services dealing with the homeless persons
- ▶ **tendency**: organised by local social services and recently even by a local government

## ... 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

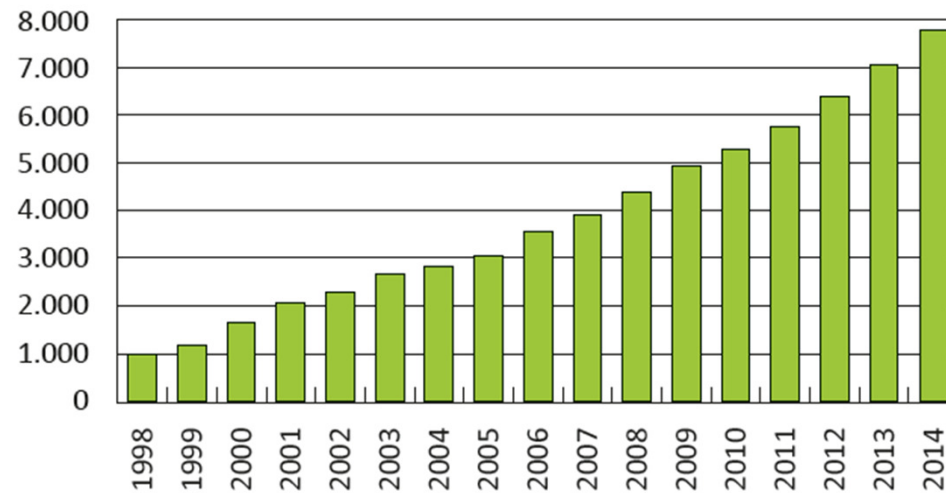
- ▶ 1985: conference **introducing** the method to the public
- ▶ 1993: **foundation** of VOB, umbrella organisation of 'new housing initiatives'
- ▶ 1993: **experiments** of the Flemish government supporting...
  - ▶ 9 local SRAs
  - ▶ VOB
- ▶ 1997: Initiatives for tenants (VOB, SRAs, tenants' organisations)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