

Stand up

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During the 80th social housing ('HLM') conference held in Paris last September, housing organisations spoke with one voice: the French system, which has almost no equivalent within Europe, must be protected. Partly funded by personal savings accounts, France's social rental offer, which comprises 4.8 million units and caters more than 11 million French people, is an important exception. The figures are inextricably linked to a mission of public service: to offer quality, spacious housing to modest households. "A nice apartment is first and foremost a big apartment," said Jean Nouvel back when he completed Nemausus with Jean-Marc Ibos. A statement which Éric Lapierre, curator of the 2019 Lisbon Triennale, would not contest. *The Poetics of Reason*, which has just opened, recalls the fundamentals to which architects must give form. The curator went on to emphasize: "we do not need disruption but continuity."

So the agenda was clear in September: strike out against the financialisation of social housing. To this end, some chose to experiment with virtuous mechanisms, such as the inverted off-plan purchase scheme put in place by Paris Habitat for the renovation of the Reuilly barracks in Paris' 12th arrondissement. But are these ingenious weapons enough to save French social housing? You might be excused for being sceptical when in fact the Trojan horse... is being fed by the State itself, through, among others, the decrease of housing benefits, the introduction of the Elan Act (law concerning future developments in housing, regional planning and digital technology, passed in June 2018), the prospect of opening social housing to private investment. It is this State who instigated, in the 1980s, experimental programmes that gave rise to exceptional projects. In the end, it is the modest households that pay the price, that is one French person out of six. So let's stand up and protect social housing.