

## Preface and acknowledgements

The idea for this study was born during my brief trip to the Netherlands in early 1998 to attend one of the (then) regular housing conferences being held at Nunspeet. Coming from the renowned isolation of Australia, I was impressed and excited by the scale of the housing research network in Europe and the strength and quality of the housing policy debate. It was serendipitous for me that a pilot program seeking foreign students to undertake their doctorate in the Faculty of Geographical Studies, Utrecht University (UU) was being promoted at the conference. Afterwards, over a weekend of solo meals in delightful Amsterdam cafes, I sketched out some ideas for a research project that would give me the opportunity to tap into this rich professional group, enable me to develop a wider and more critical view of the housing policy field, in which I had been active for nearly two decades, and, at the same time, allow me to have a much longed for career break - if doing doctoral research can be so described. Later in 1998, my proposal was accepted under the pilot program and, shortly after I commenced full time research, my husband, Gary, and I came to live in Utrecht, in May 1999, for twelve months.

Returning to doctoral research after a long stint as a public policy maker was harder than I had expected. Old skills needed to be recovered and new ones developed, another life style and work regime applied, there was a different mode of reasoning to grasp and a large knowledge gap to fill. The total change in my life was both refreshing and daunting. Being in a foreign country, where almost everything seemed different, there were many times, especially in the early months, when I thought I wouldn't succeed. Gradually, however, a direction emerged and the task seemed 'do-able' but still enormous. Along that journey, many people at home and in the Netherlands encouraged me, offering me reassurance and emotional and practical support.

My *promotoren* were my foremost supporters. Frans Dieleman backed my candidature with confidence and enthusiasm and he never wavered from his initial faith in me. He let me follow my own (at times, expansive and erratic) thoughts, while gently but firmly guiding me back to a manageable task. Throughout the four years, he has always been wise and reassuring and the successful completion of my project owes a great deal to his leadership. It has been a privilege to get to know Frans and his wife, Boukje. Together, they helped to make our time in Utrecht not only successful but also very enjoyable.

In Australia, my long-term colleague and friend, Judy Yates, agreed to be a supervisor because of her dedication to housing research, her enthusiasm for my goal and her own keen interest in (and affection for) Dutch society, generated from her experience of living in Amsterdam in the late 1960s while studying for her doctorate. Judy gave constant advice on every aspect of my study and helped me to re-learn the rigour of scientific reasoning. I am totally indebted to her for her clarity of thought and impeccable judgement, for sharing so much of her expertise with me and for her time and practical help that was given so generously.

Ronald van Kempen agreed to become my third *promotor* some months after the project began. His prodigious knowledge of housing systems, skills in formulating and directing research and careful attention to my drafting have been of great value. Soon after becoming involved, Ronald told me that the salvation of my project would be to find the

‘red thread’: that enduring theme that would bind my ideas and arguments together and direct me towards a useful conclusion. I don’t know whether I did quite meet his expectation of this but it was an empowering suggestion, to which I returned many times.

Living in a new country (especially, without the language) brings many challenges for research and, more generally, for just getting practical things done. Many people in the Netherlands smoothed that path. I would especially like to thank my roommates - initially, Marieke Langemeijer and, later, Saskia Heins - for their friendship and assistance and, particularly, for demystifying Dutch culture and society. Many others gave their valuable time to answer my long list of naïve enquiries about the Dutch housing system and to give me technical assistance. They are too numerous to name here but (I hope) they are all listed in Appendix C. Staff of the Netherlands Graduate School of Housing and Urban Research (NETHUR) and of the Faculty were always very willing to help me. I would especially like to thank Minke Veeneklaas and Winny van Pelt for their friendship and advice. My thanks also go to: Peter Hooimeijer, for his excellent course on research design; Ildi Sepsanie, who helped me to ferret out data and to translate Dutch terms; Morag Torrance, who made a speedy and expert translation of the summary of my thesis, and Emile Spek, who gave us such an informative tour of housing in Amsterdam. I am also very appreciative of the support of Johan Borchert and Josephine Borchert-Ansinger, who generously provided me with a place to stay during my second trip to Utrecht in 2001.

I relied a lot on my fellow PhD students to help refine my research design and to cope with the highs and lows of the exacting process that we shared. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful friendship and intellectual stimulation of my fellow Australian, Julie Lawson, who (together with her partner, Taco Stoppels) also provided us with the best ‘home-away-from-home’ experiences while we lived in the Netherlands. I would also like to acknowledge the companionship and support provided by the other ‘foreign’ PhD students at UU including Ari Niska, Stephan Krygsman, Tom Kauko and Nil Duroz (now Uzun). We sustained each other in workshops, at social occasions and watching sporting contests (that ‘the Aussies’ mostly won that year!) and we built new friendships, which extended to Stephan’s partner, Annadie Kidman, and to Ari’s partner, Pirkko Laurila. Nils Jacobsen, a visiting professor in the faculty for part of the year also became a fond lunch companion, with whom I enjoyed discussing world events and shared interests. In Australia, Nicole Gurrán provided regular reassurance (having recently completed her doctorate) and Lou Crabtree, a newcomer to housing studies, inspired me with her insights and fresh perspective on housing rights and citizenship. In return, I dumped on her all I knew about her new field - an unfinished collaboration.

Special mention among my PhD peers goes to a dear family friend, Kate Fagan, who on hearing of some of my doubts about my project wrote me a poem ‘*from The Book of Houses*’ which uses housing concepts as metaphors to describe the processes of learning and knowing with which we had been simultaneously challenged. Mention of Kate brings to mind the rest of the Fagan family - Bob, Margaret and James - who, together with Nancy Kerr and the other members of the Tempe Tipsters (Igor, Richie, Gary and Hugh), have brought me so much joy through their music and their friendship.

Many friends and colleagues provided critical support to get me started and/or to keep me going forward at difficult stages. I especially want to thank Mike Berry, Tony Dalton, Louise Johnson, Robyn Kennedy, Gabrielle Kibble, Jenny Morrison, Julian Neylan, Peter Phibbs and Christine Whitehead for their advice and encouragement along the way. Other wonderful friends have kept me fed, entertained and buoyed up through the hard slog. Ever present among those have been my closest friends: Lynden Esdaile and Colin Ridley, the Ross family, Barbara Livesey and Steve Shanahan.

I am very grateful for the financial and material support provided to me for this study. My former employer, the New South Wales Government, agreed to my long absence and, later, my return to work on a part time basis to enable me to finish the project. The Urban and Regional research centre Utrecht (URU) (Faculty of Geographical Studies, Utrecht University) provided financial assistance for my trips from Australia and contributed to my living costs in the Netherlands. Additional financial support to meet my research costs was provided from the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund Program (SYLFF). OTB Research Institute for Housing, Urban and Mobility Studies (Delft University of Technology) made staff available to process data on my behalf. On my return to Australia, the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney kindly provided me with a position as a visiting scholar. Without the generous support of all these institutions, the study would not have been possible.

This book is dedicated to my mother, Stella Milliner, and to the memory of my father, Frederick George Milliner. They gave me the opportunity for my education and through a lifetime of love, nurturing and support instilled in me the personal qualities, values and motivation that have helped me to make the most of that opportunity.

The last words of acknowledgement go to the two dearest people in my life, my loving partner, Gary, and our daughter, Michelle. Gary embraced my rash plan to leave my job, return to study and live abroad with the same equanimity, willingness and cooperation with which he has approached everything else that I have ever proposed doing in our life together. He has played many supporting roles over the course of the research and I could not have completed this book without him. While not wishing to evade any responsibility for this study's limitations, I consider the outcome to be as much his achievement as it is mine. After recovering from the initial shock that her parents were leaving home (as she hadn't!), Michelle has been a constant supporter. Her help started with minding our home for over a year and culminated in a hefty bout of proof reading, in her precious spare moments, done to a meticulous standard.

As I have said, during the first year of this study I realised that I faced a much tougher challenge than I had anticipated to change my modus operandi from policy to research and to bridge a near twenty-year research gap. As well, I had now begun to understand the testing challenges of doing comparative research. Despite doubts and disappointments, I have persevered and, on balance, enjoyed the experience. I am very grateful to all of the people, whether named or not, who helped me to make it possible.

Vivienne Milligan  
Sydney, April 2003.