

Municipal Housing – the Further Development of an Idea

In cooperation with the City of Vienna Wokafilm produced a movie about the history of the Vienna Municipal Housing Development. The goal was to produce a movie in a way that the audience can translate to the things shown in the film and can make logical conclusions. No unnecessary technical terms, numbers or dates. The movie should focus itself on the various objects and locations, and especially the historical movie material. Statements of architects, urban planners and especially the, Executive City Councilor for Housing Dr. Michael Ludwig were important for the movie. The production started in the fall of 2008 and was finished in April 2009. At the end of the Production Frank Hoffmann was engaged, who spoke the English and the German text for the film.

Plot:

If you look up a lexicon you can learn the following about Vienna: 1,690,000 inhabitants, making it the tenth largest city of the European Union, a city on the Danube with 23 districts, important architecture and the home of the Wiener Schnitzel. If you continue reading you discover that almost one third of the inhabitants, that is about 500,000 people, live in around 2000 municipal housing developments. The history of municipal housing is almost 100 years old.

But let's take a look back. It is 1900. Through the wave of immigration from outlying areas of the Habsburg Empire to Vienna, the population rose to a figure of over two million. The housing situation of the working class was often characterized by utterly unacceptable living conditions. One consequence of this development was high rents. The flats themselves were over-occupied, the number of sub-tenants and of people who had only the right to a bed in a flat rose, and the misery of the housing situation grew continuously worse.

The First World War not only claimed many victims, but also led to a further deterioration in the housing situation. But a start was made with dealing with this problem. Even beforehand many people had formed groups and built themselves the first, affordable settlements. The first housing cooperatives, the predecessors of municipal housing, developed. From 1922 onwards the Vienna City Council bought up sites and began to build on them. This was the birth of Viennese municipal

housing. In 1923/24 the first municipal housing block, the Metzleinstalerhof designed by architect Hubert Gesser, was completed. This building is decorated by rich ceramic decoration in the form of colourful reliefs around the windows and on the facades.

A short time later the Reumannhof was erected nearby. Now a listed monument this building contains 478 apartments, shops and businesses and facilities such as a kindergarten. The core of the complex is the *cour d'honneur* that is paved with a black and white pattern of arches; with its fountains this space makes a very grand impression. In designing such courtyards the architects borrowed elements from the large residential courtyards of the monasteries. The characteristic lamps and figures intentionally create a high-quality indeed even palatial kind of architecture for the working class.

Municipal Housing in “Red Vienna”

The Karl Marx Hof in Döbling became a symbol of “Red Vienna”, as this epoch is also known. This complex, designed by Karl Ehn, contained 1200 flats. The impressive architecture with the powerful main façade and its characteristic figures still attracts numerous visitors today, around 80 years after its completion. A visit to this complex forms part of many tours of Vienna. Generally speaking only around 30 per cent of the total site area was built over, the remainder being used to create green courtyards. The social facilities were of immense value to the tenants. They meant that it was not necessary to leave the housing blocks to bring the children to the outdoor swimming pool, to the kindergarten or to school, for example. How do people today see these municipal housing projects from the inter-war period? Light, sun and air. “Freedom for the children”, you are certainly familiar with this famous saying, which developed with this approach to architecture, so to speak. (Statement from architect Smetana)

The Werkbundsiedlung in Lainz, which was completed in 1932, is also of great architectural importance. 32 architects, among them Adolf Loos and Clemens Holzmeister, drew up plans for 70 houses, each in its own style. Every house has its own garden. Today this complex is a destination for architecture tourists throughout the world.

Austro-fascism, National Socialism and the Second World War brought to an end the construction of housing by Red Vienna, which had seen the creation of more than 60 000 apartments. Numerous Jewish residents were evicted. Valuable cultural monuments were badly affected, but so was municipal housing. Reconstruction started, once again...

Municipal Housing after 1945

One of these programmes led to the construction of the first municipal housing development after the war, the Per Albin Hansson Siedlung. The project designed by Franz Schuster was based on the interwar idea of the garden city, and was made possible by an aid programme funded by the Swedish government. But war-damaged buildings were also renovated. And a few residents recall...Building continued.

In Penzing, close to the city boundary and already in the green belt, the Vienna Council built the Hugo Breitner Hof. With 1276 flats this building is one of the largest of its kind in Vienna. In this lovely green setting the generously dimensioned courtyards and green areas are particularly striking. This building is named after finance councillor Hugo Breitner, who introduced the housing construction tax that was so important for the construction of municipal housing during the era of the First Republic. The Theodor Körnerhof in Margareten, erected in the 1950s, has extensive green areas and the first high-rise residential building.

Someone else, who discovered his area of professional activity near the Hugo Breitner Hof, fulfilled the dream of becoming a football player. The continuation of the concept of municipal housing, the socially-oriented Viennese housing of the present era began with buildings like Wohnpark Alt Erlaa. Swimming pools on the roof establish new standards. The concept of stepped housing blocks is continued in the Heinz Nittel Hof in Floridsdorf. Harry Glück designed this complex with 1380 dwelling units and large terraces, underground garages and roof-top swimming pools. These striking stepped buildings served as a backdrop for the Hollywood film "*Break Dance*".

The social changes of the 1990s led to the construction of theme-based developments. One of these is the car-free model development in Floridsdorf. The residents continue the design of their complex themselves. Children can play in

entirely natural surroundings. Roof terraces are designed and extended by the residents. Very close by is a further theme-related development known as the “Frauenwerkstatt” (Women’s Workshop). This complex that slopes at an angle down to a village green caters, above all, to the housing needs of women. In this way (and much to their own delight of course) children reach the day care centre in safety.

A housing development known as the Sargfabrik (literally coffin factory) was erected on the site of a former coffin factory in Penzing – with a striking orange external facade. High above Penzing here, too, people design their own roof terraces and some harvest vegetables they have planted. Communal facilities in the Sargfabrik such as a restaurant, bar and spaces for holding events ensure that many people from the surrounding area visit this complex.

The Future of Municipal Housing has already started

The future has already been implemented to some extent in the inter-ethnic housing development in Liesing, which was awarded the first Viennese Housing Prize in 2009. The playgrounds and communal facilities are used by people who originally hail from many different countries.

Environmental consciousness played an important role in the construction of the Bike City in Vienna Leopoldstadt. The courtyards, and thus the outdoor spaces, are quiet and sheltered from traffic. Special facilities were created for storing the bicycles and making it easier to reach them.

The extension of public transport services to the periphery makes the outskirts of the city, too, into an attractive residential area. Kellergasse development lies directly on the border to Perchtoldsdorf. In this complex consisting of row houses wood is the dominant material.

Its pendant in the west is the model development in Hadersdorf, where concrete was the dominant building material. Here internationally acclaimed architects developed individual house typologies. In modern housing design the formation of new urban districts also plays an important role. In this context Donaucity and Wohnpark Neue Donau on the left bank of the Danube are as influential as the Wienberg City in the south of the city, which is visible from a considerable distance. The maintenance and

renovation of the earlier municipal housing developments also plays a most significant role. For example: in the Hugo Breitner Hof not only were solar collector panels fitted to the roofs but converted loft apartments were also made, which represent attractive living space for young people.

The future of subsidised housing has, of course, long since started. For instance in Vienna Liesing, where new affordable housing is being built on the site of a former brewery. Or on Pelagonienweg in the Donaustadt, where the development resembles a road in a village. Or in the design for “Young Housing at the Nordbahnhof”.

In international comparison, too, Viennese municipal developments represent the most economical kind of housing. The path was a long and arduous one, but well worth the effort. The basic concept has always been: good housing must be affordable, for everyone. Seen from this perspective the basic idea behind social housing in Vienna has not changed.....

Production Team:

Wokafilm

Script: Herbert Kafka

Producer: Gabriela Kafka

Director of Photography: Herbert Kafka

Cutter: Herbert Kafka with Final Cut Pro

Sound Editing: Andreas Kafka

Score: Blue Valley

Interview Assistance: Matthias Kafka

Trailer: <http://wokafilm.beepworld.de/gemeindebau.htm>

Orders under:

Wokafilm

Hochstrass 402

3033 Altlengbach

0676 3107031

office@wokafilm.at