

Flexibility in the living area – new challenges, innovative solutions

das fernlicht – D. Maerki/A. Schikowitz, Vienna, 2008

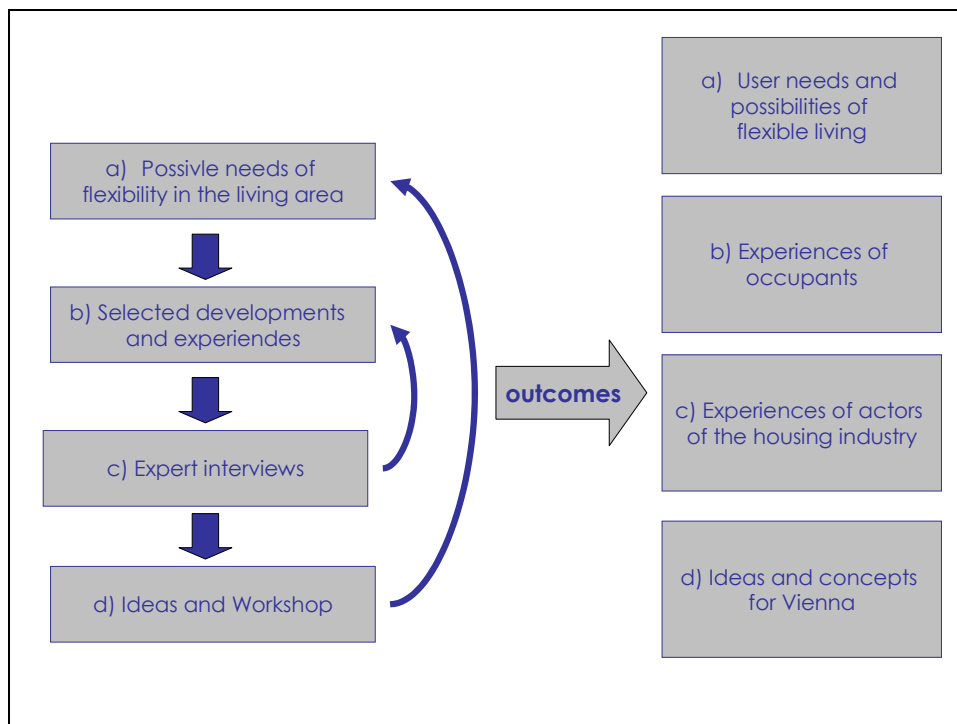
founded by MA 50 housing research

Abstract

Initial situation, questions and approach

People and lifestyles are changing permanently – work, income, partners, family-modes and therefore housing needs. That's why new challenges for developers in the area of flexibility appear.

The goal of the study was to analyse user needs, possible solutions and new challenges.



Methods:

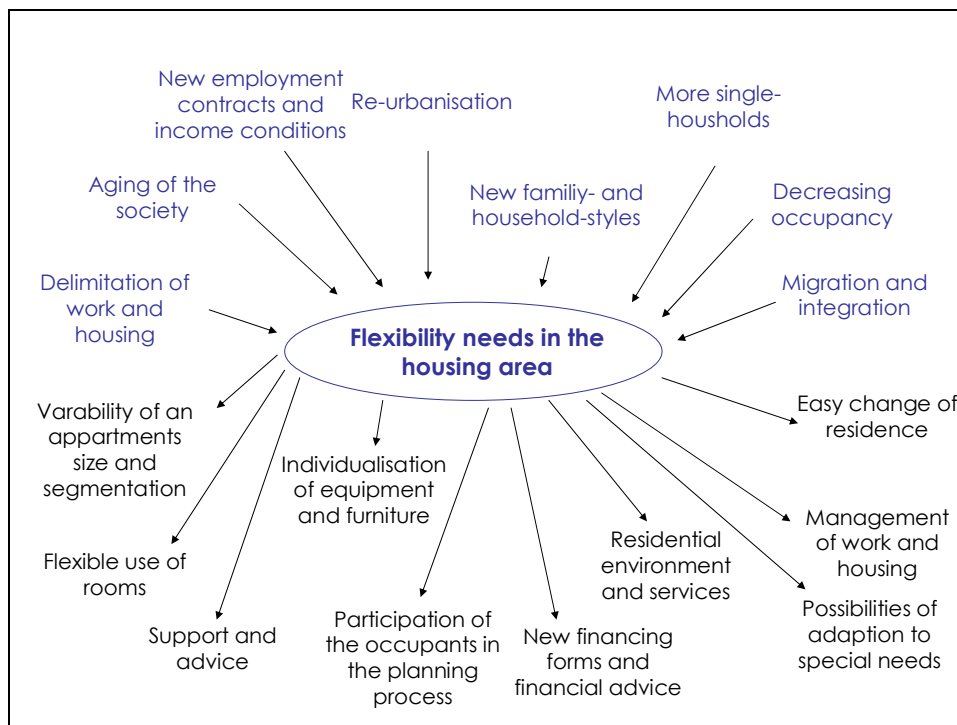
- **Literature and Internet search**
- **Guided expert interviews**
- **Guided interviews with occupants** and persons in different living situations about their experiences with flexible living including an inspection of their apartment or house.
- **Analysis of success stories and best practices**
- **Workshop to discuss concrete ideas:** The workshop is oriented on the **lead user approach** in order to collect needs of target groups and develop concrete ideas. The participants

have various living situations with probably high flexibility needs – members of patchwork families, migrants, singles, etc.

- **Interpretation of the interviews and the workshop via content analysis**, oriented on qualitative target analysis by Froschauer/Lueger (Froschauer, Lueger, 2003, S. 158ff.).

Central findings and conclusions – zonal room use

The standard-flat was oriented on the traditional nuclear family for decades. Nowadays the nuclear family is under-represented under an enormous diversity of family- and household-types – flat-sharing communities, single-households, patchwork families, housing-types for the elderly, etc. Life and housing are changing, but developers are still working with the picture of traditional families. Changing living situations and mobility need flexible solutions which are suitable to anticipate changing user needs.

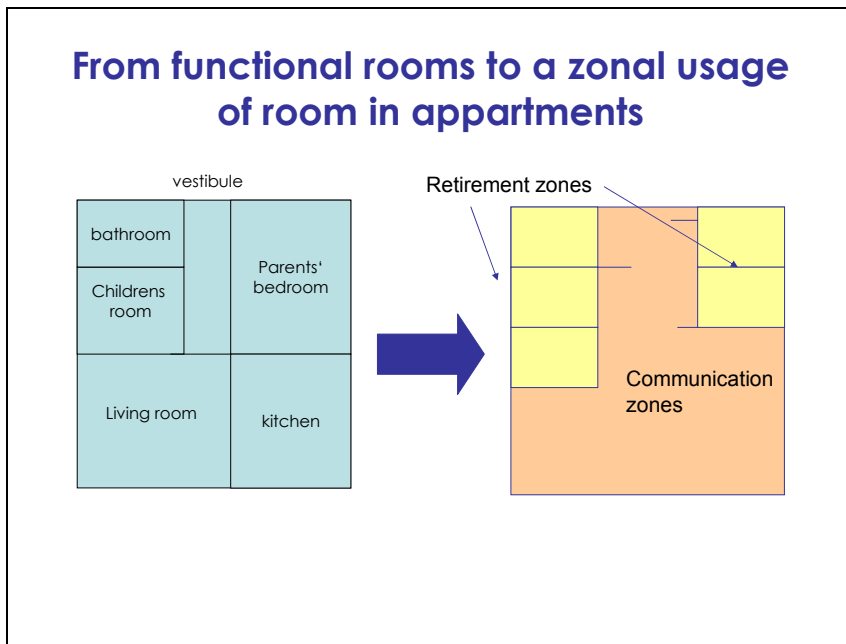


A flexible usage also means a sort of **fuzziness**, the appearance of new questions and the need for innovative solutions. To enable flexibility there are some **configuration elements** to configure the living situation according to the user needs.

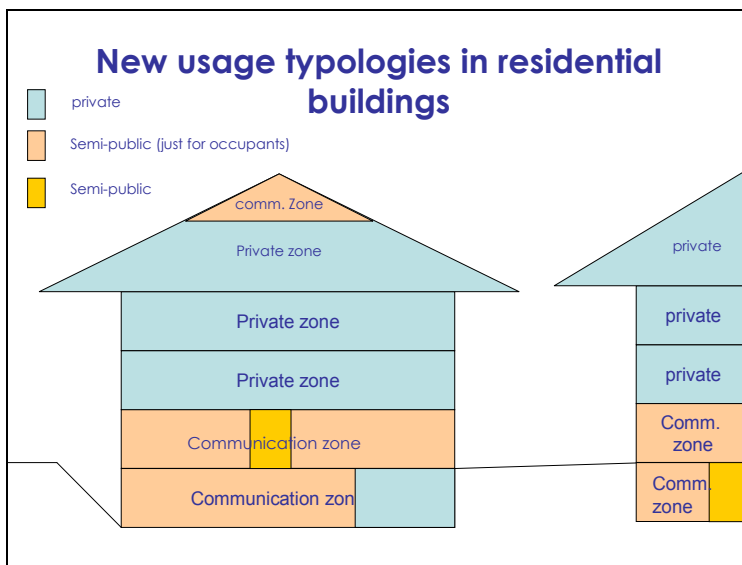
- **Use of living space – floor plans:** un-determined floor plans (position and size of rooms and position of wall sockets should not determine the usage of a room) and variable floor plans
- **Composition of living space:** flexible walls, modular living spaces or container houses
- **Equipment of living space:** adaptable or multifunctional furniture as well as technical equipment including cabling, empty conduit and enough wall sockets in all rooms

- **Home services:** (Online) home services are especially relevant for the elderly and new living forms. There is a threat to exclude people who are not able to pay for these services. Sharing of resources and functions of neighbourhood could help.
- **Financing of living space:** New financing and funding models as well as advice

Future housing means to move from functional division of rooms towards a **zonal usage of room**, which is divided into private retirement rooms and various public and semi-public zones.



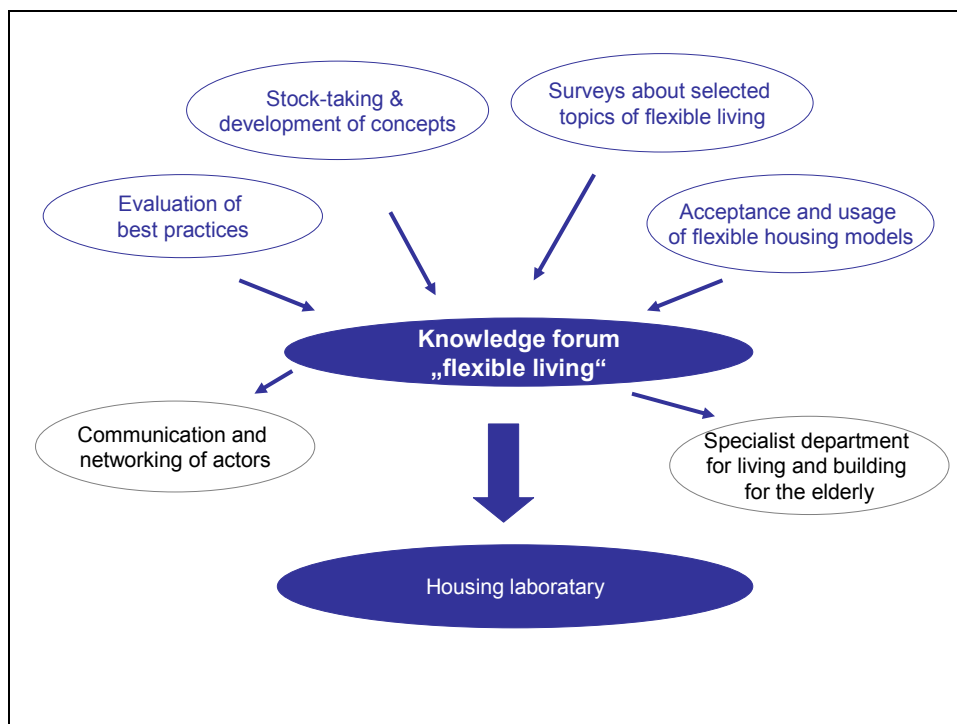
Traditional family patter will be replaced by new forms of households as elderly, singles, people working at home, etc. Their relationship to the **residential environment** rises. That's why the relevance of **common zones and semi-public rooms** rises, too.



For Vienna, it would be interesting to capture **unused room** in municipal housing qualitatively and quantitatively and to work out ideas for temporary and flexible use with interdisciplinary teams (Vienna housing, architects, sociologists, technicians, etc.).

- Search (best practices)
- Ideas competitions
- Occupant-surveys and/or workshops

There is a great dynamic in flexible living and at the same time the various concepts and actors are very fuzzy. It would make sense to **focus the know-how** to lead the way in the area of flexible living. Possibilities are events, pilots, or a **knowledge forum** (for example the concept of *das fernlicht*).



Outputs of a knowledge forum could be:

- Communication and networking of actors
- Specialist departments to capture and analyse user needs for selected target groups and to develop concrete solutions. For example a specialist department for living and building for the elderly.
- A housing laboratory to evaluate innovative solutions