

I n d e p e n d e n t L i v i n g f o r E l d e r l y P e o p l e

International living models as solution approaches for the City of Vienna

A b s t r a c t

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Independent living

Elderly people want to live independently. And they want to live in their own dwellings as long as possible. This wish of living independently can be complied today with various planning models. Especially in new erected buildings it is easy to enable independent living by different measures. It is only necessary to dispel the barriers in the heads of architects, building societies and other project executing organizations. But to enable in existing apartment buildings barrier freeness, adaptation for living with wheelchairs or simply smart living with technology support, pose a big challenge to the architectural design and cause also higher financial investments.

Situation in the building stock

How does the situation in the building stock look like? The dwelling stock out of the 1950ies and 1960ies is now to be modernized but poses for the housing industry a great financial and organizational challenge. Even though Austria is refurbishing diligently and Vienna is experienced in the renovation of larger housing estates, the real critical urban areas with their complex problem fields have not been touched by now and appropriate solutions have to be developed first. Especially in the Viennese districts Favoriten, Simmering, Fünfhaus, Liesing, Floridsdorf and Donaustadt the share of elderly people will increase dramatically. And there mainly urban areas will be affected, which are erected in the 1960ies and 1970ies.

Task of the study

Because of the above described situation, the study „Independent living for elderly people – International living models as solution approaches for the City of Vienna“ is concentrating on projects which fulfill the following criteria's:

- Erected from the beginning of the 1950ies
- Urban site in an outer district
- Social housing and respectively pre-fab tower blocks
- Residential area with a high share of elderly citizens

Furthermore the different measures should be analyzed in more detail, which were taken to supply independent living at the investigated projects. These measures are:

- Renovation and reconstruction
- Modernisation arrangements
- Implementation of new technologies
- Alternative living models, e.g. housing of old and young, more-generation-housing etc.
- Interventions of private associations to overcome design failures, e.g. breakup of the “ghettoisation” with common actions.

Selection of the international living models

The following projects were selected and analyzed:

- Wohnsiedlung Heerstraße-Nord, Berlin
- Ernst Thälmann-Ring, Greifswald
- Hans-Böckler-Siedlung, Offenbach-Bürgel
- Hofje, Berlin
- Eiselstraße, Gera
- Cohnsche Viertel, Hennigsdorf
- Service-Wohnhaus, Krefeld
- Wohnüberbauung Davidsboden, Basel
- Finnish Wellbeing Center, Sendai
- Toimiva koti, Helsinki

The selected projects can be summarized under the following aspects:

Decentralization of social- and care services

Here the main emphasis is based on the idea of the decentralization of social- and care services, themed: not the senior comes to the nursing home but the nursing services come to the senior.

Renovation, reconstruction

At some of the projects the integrative concept of sustainable renovation was realized exemplarily. In one case the refurbishment was accompanied by an intensive, interdisciplinary research with the focus on the social dimension of the project. In another case the neighborly helping approach made the project, beside the reconstruction, to an exemplary living model. But sometimes the question comes up if the advantages gained from the reconstruction are worth the heavy investments.

Smart living with technology support

Also smart technology was applied in one or the other project. But it can also happen that the tenants move in not because of the smart technical equipment but because of the attractiveness of the building, the barrier free design and the amply dwellings.

Intervention by associations

Often private associations (like the grey panther) have to intervene so that elderly citizens can participate at the public life; and that even in exemplarily refurbished areas.

Urban development models

Care centers can take a central role within a whole city district and serve there also as communication platform. Furthermore it is possible to connect private homes to the center with the help of assistive technologies.

Service offering

A refurbished dwelling, which serves as service center, demonstrates how the living environment can be adapted for handicapped people with commercial products. Here private persons can get information about the products on the market and they have the opportunity to test them before adapting their dwellings.

Conclusion of the projects

Independent living in building stock is a new approach. Internationally a common approach in questions of adaptation did not crystallize till now.

The different solutions reach from low intervention projects to the adaptation of single multistory buildings up to interventions in the urban area. It is the site itself with all its conditions, peculiarities and problems which defines the solution approach for independent living. There are no simplified standard models; maybe they can be identified sometime but therefore more research work has to be done and more solutions should be tested on similar problems.

Recapitulating it has to be stated that assistive technologies are used very sparsely. That has to do with a poor technical knowledge of the now older generation but also with the inability of the industry to communicate real advantages of such technologies to the public. In a long run only those dwellings will be competitive, under the precondition that mobility in general will rise during the next years, which can show a certain „more“ (a „more“ of location, a „more“ of furnishing etc.). And assistive technologies offer such a „more“.

Social-cultural aspects

Most of the projects with social-cultural background (e.g. living of old and young etc.) started with a lot of engagement but finally failed out of different reasons. For this kind of projects it will be necessary to identify those conditions which lead to success.

Failed has also the tendency to erect nursing and care homes in the open countryside: most of the elderly people do not want to live in the middle of nowhere – they want to live at central points where life is going on.

If elderly people are not settled around the care facilities anymore, the services must come to the elderly citizens. But the decentralization of the service and care offering will cause higher costs. To counteract this development more and more small voluntary services will establish investing time for public utility work.

Recapitulating it can be said that for independent living for elderly people the social-cultural aspects are as much important as the constructive ones. Therefore residential buildings can be successfully enhanced only with a combination of constructive and social-cultural interventions.

Measures for the City of Vienna

The results of this study are only partly applicable for the City of Vienna. A problem analysis on a micro level would be necessary to work out a tailor made solution for Viennese localities.

Pilot project

It will be recommended to carry out an analysis of the current situation in a concrete problem zone (e.g. in one of the larger housing estates) to describe the state of affairs. In doing so, not only the constructive aspects, the infrastructure, the service offering etc. is to analyze but also the social-cultural aspects (e.g. communication, social components, atmospheric, routines or expectations etc.)

With the result of this analysis a concept could be elaborated targeting – beside the constructive measures – the possible employment of assistive technologies, the focused intervention in the infra- and personal service structure but also the enhancement of the qualitative social-cultural encounter.

Competence center habitation

Also in Vienna the project of a *tomiva koti* could be realized with low expenses to promote the topic of independent living. For example the „Wohnservice Wien“ could advance with such an offering to a full-service organization in questions of habitation.