

**Ensuring social sustainability in the two-stage housing developers' competition –
An evaluation of sociological aspects. An interim result.**

By showcasing the dialogue-oriented procedures „Wohnen am Marchfeldkanal“ and „In der Wiesen“ as well as the two-stage competition „Preyersche Höfe“.

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to its dynamic growth, Vienna is going to make major investments in the housing sector over the next few years. This means great challenges for the housing policy - but also for infrastructure policy - because what is needed are not individual, „mere“ residential complexes but highly integrated, **socially mixed urban neighbourhoods**.

Therefore, in the expanding city, housing construction must take on more and more the role of a **catalyst of urban development. Housing construction as the „maker“ of the city!**? The main precondition of this is quality assurance of buildings - based on the sustainability targets defined by the City of Vienna and in addition to that the permanent quest for new standards in urban planning, architecture and energy efficiency and last but not least also social standards. The dynamic growth of the city, the continued socio-demographic differentiation, the need for additional housing and infrastructure, and, simultaneously, an increasingly tightening land market and rising rents are only some of the challenges the City of Vienna is currently faced with.

These challenges at the municipal level also have a significant influence on the instruments of quality assurance in Viennese subsidised housing, especially on housing developers' competitions, calling for their constant development.

THE INSTRUMENT OF THE VIENNESE HOUSING DEVELOPERS' COMPETITIONS

When in 1995 the two first housing developers' competitions were organised, this meant a radical change in the system of distribution of building sites and of funds for subsidised housing. Moving away from allocation, the new system should lead to a „comparison of offers“.

As of 1995, the contributions submitted for developers' competitions were, for that purpose, assessed according to criteria from the three quality pillars „planning quality, economy and ecology“. Already at that time the equal status of these three pillars was underlined by the awarding authority. Among the criteria, social aspects were not explicitly named, but were considered included in the existing pillars. In order to allow a qualified assessment of the different criteria, the intersciplinarity of the jury was extended markedly in comparison with previous architectural competitions. Project assessment was then to be carried out on the basis of individual parcels of land, an aspect which is interesting in today's discussion about building-site-overlapping, dialogue-based approaches. This type of evaluation should guarantee the required degree of objectivity according to a sophisticated point system.

The first substantial change to the instrument of developers' competitions was the implementation of „social sustainability“ as the fourth quality pillar in 2009. Social aspects that previously had been more or less clearly implied in the other criteria, now become explicitly visible and are on a par with the other three quality pillars.

The core objectives of this new quality pillar are: ensuring suitability for everyday use, reduction of construction and operating costs through appropriate planning, social mix, participation, identity and community development, and the possibility of varied uses, by varied groups of users and for varied styles of living thanks to a variety and flexibility of floor plans and community space.

In 2013 another important step is made in the development of Viennese housing developers' competitions: The first „dialogue-oriented“, two-stage developers' competitions are held. This new format of a two-stage competition provides for a new level of standards: moving away from housebuilding on a single building site towards coordination and tuning of several neighbouring construction areas with one another as well as with existing neighbourhoods and their residents. For that purpose, after a competitive first stage which should be limited to a competition of ideas, one project per building site is recommended for further processing at the second stage. In the dialogue phase that follows meetings and workshops will be held, in the course of which all projects – including those on neighbouring building sites - will be developed towards matching them with one another. The results are then assessed according to the usual four-pillar model.

TASK FORMULATION AND STUDY DESIGN

Two decades of existence of the quality assurance tools housing developers' competition and land advisory board of the wohnfonds_wien are a reason to validate these instruments: Do the results fulfil the expectations placed in them? Which tools have proved effective and how about their acceptance by stakeholders and players? What role do aspects of social sustainability actually play?

The present study on securing social sustainability in two-stage housing developers' competitions which is based on a broad **online survey** among the actors involved, on representative **interviews** with experts concerned and on the **analysis of three case studies** is meant to be a contribution to the debate about adequate quality assurance. The results of the study confirm that the issues, topics and approaches which housing developers' competitions transport are **basically going in the right direction**. There is, however, a certain **need for improvement** with regard to processes and to the implementation of social measures in order to guarantee reaching the ambitious targets set.

RESULTS OF THE INTERIM EVALUATION

In what follows the results of the priority themes „social sustainability“(product quality) and process design (process quality) will be summarized:

>> *Social sustainability remains a major challenge of future housing construction: The crucial question is „Which exactly are the social values that a „sustainable“ development should put into practice?“ <<*

The quality objective „social sustainability“ is to be re-defined continually in the light of social change and residential conditions – so the tenor of the study. Therefore ongoing monitoring and evaluation on a regular basis of existing residential buildings/areas is judged particularly important. Moreover, social sustainability in housing calls for future visions of life in cities, for images of „the desirable“. Thus, the use of criteria of social sustainability in selection procedures in housing construction is a real **cross-sectoral topic**, which challenges all participants and stakeholders alike and hence must be jointly implemented.

Within the framework of housing developers' competitions the study identifies the following **key aspects** of „social sustainability“ which should be taken more into consideration in the future:

- Different **actors define „social sustainability“ in very different ways**. This „**flabbiness**“ in defining the term leads to ambiguity concerning the guidelines on the quality criterion „social sustainability“ in the invitation to tender of housing developers' competitions. An even **more specific definition** of social objectives and programmes – especially in terms of financial and legal frameworks – is often considered necessary to be able to take appropriate measures.
- Nearly half the people questioned judge the results regarding social sustainability in **conventional two-stage housing developers' competitions** as „good“ or „satisfactory“. Criticism refers to the fact that results may be too vague or lack practical relevance. Their implementation may be doubtful and often depending on property developers and on the cooperation of architectural firms. The **results obtained in dialogue-oriented procedures** are generally assessed more positively. This is also attributed to the „dialogue“ and to workshops respectively. The results focussing on „social sustainability“ would definitely be influenced by this too – at least in certain aspects such as the fine-tuning and **coordination** of measures, the **understanding for diverse needs** and the **continuity** and binding nature of the implementation of these measures.
- Successful and permanent **acceptance** of the varied **offer of common space** and of the socio-cultural infrastructure as a whole is a challenge for all players. Questions of **cost, administration and use of common space/rooms** sometimes prove difficult. Also cooperation between building-site-overlapping planning teams and developers has worked only partly up to now and **joint housing management** will need improved coordination in future.
- It is seen as problematic that so many **additional qualities** are being called for – with all of the four pillars – while the overall **cost of the project** must not increase. This would lead to **restrictions and compromise solutions** both in planning and implementation of the projects. Therefore legal and financial exemption rules should be taken into consideration in case of socially innovative projects.
- The critics of the current developer's competitions culture assert that in view of decreasing incomes „**price as an aspect of social sustainability**“ is nowadays not being sufficiently taken account of. Thus, the objective cannot be sophisticated forms of housing but „**high-quality simplicity**“.
- Some have also **urged** that in two-stage dialogue-based developers' competitions a **guiding concept (roadmap)** must be worked out not only for urban development and outdoor space, but also for „social sustainability“.
- Further **future issues of „social sustainability“** raised in the present survey that are also relevant in the context of two-stage housing developers' competitions are:
 - o fine-grain mix of different uses, legal forms, social groups, and housing concepts; generally good mix of uses within the project area (beyond merely residential functions)
 - o new concepts for ground floor use (pedestal zones)
 - o keeping areas free for unplanned functions, space for appropriation according to changing needs

- deliberate opening up of opportunities for participation on different levels for identity development and strengthening of „social capital“
- review and further development of the strategy of temporary housing management as a socially-organizational boost and of „community-design“
- preservation of social compatibility in high-density quarters with a high percentage of smart housing units (possible problem of apartment overcrowding)

>> Attention focusses increasingly on the quality of process design, i.e. the further optimisation of process quality. The future belongs to „dialogue-oriented“, cooperative procedures. <<

Nowadays - and especially in the future - **new quality standards** apply also to public services like to any other product. Alongside with product quality focussing on „social sustainability“, the present study is centred on „**process quality“ in process organization**. To guarantee long-term success with regard to the pre-set goals, ongoing optimisation of the „process quality“ is required. Procedures need to be mapped and analysed, weaknesses and potentials must be identified and interfaces harmonised, so that the service – in our case the process organisation needed to ensure the high standards of Viennese housing – can be optimized and guaranteed on a sustainable basis.

Both in the online poll and in the extensive interviews with selected experts numerous suggestions and demands were made concerning the process of two-stage competition procedures. The field reports in the three documented case studies also call for action in the organisation of processes.

As an interim result and a contribution to the discussion about the further development of process organisation for two-stage housing developers' competitions, the following items can be summarized from the suggestions made by experts and stakeholders:

- A **representative majority** of the stakeholders questioned (property developers, architectural firms and consultants) basically advocates an increased **use of dialogue-based procedures** in two-stage developers' competitions in case several plots of land are involved. However, we should learn from the experiences of the first two procedures and do some touching-up especially with process organisation of the second stage.
- The added value of „dialogue-oriented“ procedures is seen above all in a **better tuning, coordination and cooperation** of developers amongst themselves and in mutual exchange and **joint learning processes**, which help improve **product quality** as well as **process quality**.
- The **strengths** of „dialogue-oriented“ two-stage competition procedures are furthermore spotted in a clearly stronger **relation to the neighbourhood**, higher **interdisciplinarity** and **increased opportunities for discussion, criticism and reflection**. However, a qualified minority considers these procedures as excessive and hence uneconomical.
- A majority of the people questioned is of the opinion that **public participation**, i.e. the inclusion of **neighbours, local initiatives and other stakeholders** is generally more successful in **dialogue-based competition procedures**. Basically, these issues should be dealt with already at an early stage or in the course of zoning.
- Several experts (with experience as jury members) have made a clear recommendation for a **revised version of the task of process control**. The necessary quality management must be ensured either by establishing an „**internal“ process control** in the wohnfonds_wien or by „**third-party“ commissioning**.

- With regard to **the role of „key policies“** in processes there are fairly contradictory positions: Some consider working with and at key policies the gist of all dialogue-oriented two-stage competition procedures and as something like a **„master plan“**, while others see a **wide open concept** as the precondition of a successful dialogue.

- Obviously there is consensus that the implementation of „social sustainability“ as the fourth pillar **has curbed the former dominance of architecture**. There is however a risk that in the future **„social sustainability“ might become pure routine** and would in many cases be put into practise only in cooperation with big (church) social services.

- Further concrete **need for improvement** in dialogue-oriented two-stage procedures is mentioned for the following items:
 - adaptations for process design and in particular for process control
 - a clearer definition of tasks and objectives
 - a stricter limitation at the first stage to concepts and „competition of ideas“
 - professional moderating of workshops
 - compensation for additional time expenditure and economic effort
 - deliberate involvement of young architectural firms
 - integration of additional players
 - more explicit reference to urban development, urban planning and quarter
 - effective implementation of the measures of „social sustainability“