

Models of Communal Living in Vienna – Survey of Demand and Perspectives

Summary – Final Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social relevance

Recently an increasing trend towards more self-determination and a desire for community has emerged. The reasons may be found in our increasingly differentiating society regarding the stages of life, the concept of work, as well as the significance of family relationships. Apart from food-coops, community gardens and co-operative work forms it is the increasingly popular concept of collaborative or communal living which points in this direction. Even more and more elderly citizens want to show solidarity in such projects, thus participating in society more intensively.

1.2 International Trend

There is a growing number of forms of collaborative or communal living in countries such as Germany, Scandinavia, in the Netherlands, England, Scotland and Switzerland, as well as in the USA, Japan and Korea. Exchange of experiences on an international level happens at conferences like the “First Collaborative (Co-) housing Conference” in Stockholm in 2010, but also on a national level. Regular events are held in Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and many other cities in Germany.

1.3 The Communal in Viennese Housing

Community is also an elemental part in subsidised housing projects in Vienna. Right from the beginning of the 1920s, the Superblocks of „Red Vienna“ and the simultaneously built and self-constructed developments of the „Settler Movement“ incorporated communal aspects both in typological as well as in the underlying ideological ways. In the post-war period, participative and self-managed housing projects emerged as a response to the large-scale property-developer projects. Ever since the year 2000 a vanguard of self-determined and autonomic „bottom-up“ collaborative housing co-operatives has emerged.

By introducing the category of „social sustainability“ to property-developer competitions in 2009 and the increasing efforts of politicians to stimulate affordable housing, forms of communal living have increasingly emerged in „top-down“ projects as well.

2. Structure and objective of the study

At the occasion of topic related events, exhibitions and visits of existing Viennese co-housing projects, a wide interest in this form of housing can be noticed among the population. Waiting lists for such projects fill fast. But is that representative for all Vienna? And how can already existing scattered projects be recognised as a form of housing in its own right? And furthermore: What is needed to elevate their inherent ideas and elements from a state of experimentation to a new facet of Viennese housing?

To answer these questions the study “Models of Communal Living in Vienna – Survey of Demand and Perspectives” started out by compiling existing projects, aiming to establish an overview of the typological range as well as the underlying legal and financial framework. On top of that a survey of demand was carried out in co-operation with the Austrian Gallup Institute to ascertain the population’s attitude towards communal living models. Based on these findings and completed with interviews with experts and the results of a workshop, suggested ways of action were pointed out. Selective adaptations in the frameworks were recommended to enable and guarantee the implementation and sustainable use of communal living projects of different kinds.

3. Basic research

3.1 Definition

This study defines „communal living“ as a dwelling form that provides rooms for communal usage in addition to private flats. This aspect allows neighbourly relationships of varying intensity, thus providing direct ways of mutual support. Joint actions within such a group may well have positive effects on the surroundings and the neighbourhood.

Under certain conditions this concept may react better to demographic changes than „individual“ housing.

3.2 Demographic development and land consumption

Vienna’s rapid growth increases the pressure on residential property both in new developments and in existing buildings. The increase in consumption of energy and space per capita may be reduced by collaborative (co)-housing projects. By outsourcing areas of collective use the proportion of private and individual space can be minimised and costs can be reduced.

Today, already almost half of Vienna households are inhabited by singles. With rising age this number increases as partners die. Many of those live alone in their former family apartments for economic reasons, risking isolation. Facilities like spaces for collective use or other communication-enhancing features may help to create a socially active environment with good neighbourly relationships. That is why this form of housing is an attractive alternative, for elderly as well as for younger people.

4. Typologies of joint housing

By inspecting and analysing existing projects, by interviewing experts, planners, people involved in those projects and developers, this study provided a survey of projects with a decidedly community-orientated character in publicly funded housing which have been created in the past five to seven years. Those projects were categorised according to their architectural design – the „hardware“- and their community and communication orientated criteria – the „software“. The latter describes processes that help turn anonymous tenants into real neighbours. These processes start with elements of participation in planning, continue with moderated processes at the stage of moving in, and lead to self-management during inhabitation. The projects were ranked with regards to their scale and their underlying intentions. According to scale these projects are divided in flat-sharing (Wohngemeinschaften), co-living (Wohngruppen), co-housing (Hausgemeinschaften) and so-called integrated neighbourhoods (integrierte Nachbarschaften) as the largest unit. Size and typology are individually related and allow narrower or looser defined forms of co-housing. Referring to possible effects on the surrounding environment a direct connection between scale and typology can be observed: the larger the project, the deeper the identification of the tenants with their building and the solidarity among them, the better their image and the bigger their influence.

Other classifications concern individual situations in life, forms of living, groups with shared interests, or plurality and diversity regarding generations or origin of the tenants.

The following projects were discussed in detail:

CITYCOM2; Young Corner Flatshare; Wohngruppe für Fortgeschrittene; das Wohnprojekt Wien; MM11 – mitten im 11ten; so.vie.so; ICH_DU_WIRplus; OASE 22; Wohnzimmer Sonnwendviertel; Bike-City; das Wohnprojekt in der Grundsteingasse; der Wohnhof Orasteig; das Interkulturelle Wohnen »Regenbogen«.

Findings and experiences from current projects like those in „Seestadt Aspern“ also found their way into the study.

4.1 Hardware

A chapter of its own analyses floor plans, areas for communal usage and outdoor spaces with their relevance and potential towards fostering a sense of community. Spaces for communal use have a special importance. They may be anything from „open use“ to completely equipped and are of great variety regarding their size and location within the buildings. There are joint eat-in-kitchens, playrooms for children, workshops and offices, but also rooms for fitness or recreation. A secondary analysis of existing studies on this topic winds up this section.

Five projects were inspected more closely regarding the ratio between overall net planning area and areas of communal use. It shows that the system of so-called „Heimförderung“ like in the „Wohnprojekt Wien“ allows for much bigger areas of shared use. Projects dealing with existing built structures find it most difficult to create such areas at reasonable costs. The problem of financing such areas within the framework of public funding is discussed in a chapter of its own.

4.2 Software

The following processes and instruments were identified as relevant for forms of communal housing:

- the possibility of participation in the stage of planning:
Communities form easily and more directly within projects that offer the tenants involvement in the project by participation in planning before they move in. This is particularly important with issues around communal and shared areas. Moreover, this enables the planners a more flexible approach to different living forms and situations in life.
- Access and assignment of apartments:
Here the varying possibilities of assignment of apartments is discussed just like the issue, which consequences that entails for the community.
- Usage, management, possibilities of acquisition of the provided facilities by the tenants and further instruments like managing the process of moving in and means of communication.

5. Requirements in quality and quantity

5.1 Assessment of demand

Together with the Austrian Gallup Institute a representative survey of demand was developed. A poll was carried out in July and August 2014, interviewing 1.000 people of varying age groups about their notions, motives, fears and hopes regarding aspects of communal or collective housing.

These are the findings:

- The awareness level of joint housing is high. More than two thirds of the interviewees are familiar with this form of living. This leads to the conclusion that this form of living is no longer a side issue.
- 39% of the interviewees of all age groups can principally imagine to move into a communal living project. Students and pupils share the widest acceptance.
- Regarding the individual stages in life, moving into such a form of housing is best conceivable when retired (33%), after a partner's death (25%) or during the period of founding a family (24%).
- Mutual support in everyday life, living in a community (not living alone) and sharing of rooms, objects and vehicles would be reasons for many to move into such a project.
- Elderly people tend towards expecting mutual support in communal living, the younger generation rather expects cutting costs. In spite of the relatively high interest in this form of housing there is great insecurity about the issue where to find information about already existing or planned projects of such kind.

5.2 Workshop (participants, procedure, results)

A group of experts discussed the results of the opinion poll. Representatives from all relevant fields were present, such as the housing department, the founding association, the contracting company and other important authorities of the City of Vienna, as well as experts of housing companies and social organisations.

Together, suggestions were developed as to improve the realisation of communal living models more easily.

6. Perspectives / recommended courses of action

Based on these findings and the results of previous own studies, the authors will present the following summary of recommended courses of action relevant for fostering projects of communal living both in new developments and in existing buildings:

- Information and counselling for those who are interested, creation of an information pool and a panel of experts, linking up relevant players, joint efforts of all parties involved
- revision and adaption of the legal framework, like public funding of housing, building regulations (in particular the law regarding the provision of parking space), and the assignment of apartments.
- supporting the development of housing forms which are robust and easily appropriated, support of self-organised groups by socio-scientific assistance and situative mediation.