



Evaluation of Social Sustainability in Subsidised Housing Construction Projects

Final Report - Summary
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Summary

In 2009, a fourth pillar was added to the three-pillar model for the assessment of subsidised housing construction projects in Vienna. The “architecture”, “economy” and “ecology” pillars were complemented by the pillar of “social sustainability”. Four years later, this evaluation examines the impact of this introduction on the basis of nine subsidised housing projects, five of which were recommended for funding on the basis of property development competitions and four on basis of a positive assessment by the Land Advisory Board. The goal of the evaluation was to present the priorities of each project in respect to “social sustainability” based on planning documents as well as to perform field inspections of the projects, on the implementation and quality of implementation. In addition, the aim was to draw first conclusions for possible further development of the criteria of social sustainability.

Findings

Overall, the evaluation shows that the all developers successfully fulfilled the new requirements for “social sustainability”, although they individually pursued diverse priorities and addressed of the list of criteria in varying ways. The variety of approaches through which the evaluated projects addressed of the issue of social sustainability was impressive and showed promise for the future. Apart from the consideration of the criteria in the planning phase, the evaluators also regard the **implementation** as **successful**: the good quality of the floor plans, the use of adequate and in part high-quality materials for the common rooms, workshops and rehearsal rooms, committed process facilitation and (social) concepts are decisive factors in this assessment. As built and implemented, none of the nine assessed projects showed any significant deviation from their planned programs for “social sustainability” that they proposed in their funding submissions.

It has to be noted, however, that several criteria cannot be objectively reviewed because of their qualitative character or because of the lack of benchmarks or minimum standards. Sustainability by definition also refers to the long-term behaviour of a system over a longer period of time so that social sustainability can only be properly assessed after an adequate observation period.

Priorities: **Living in community** is a theme running through all project descriptions and is most of all reflected in the spacious common rooms and terraces of the buildings. Offering different types of housing for various housing needs as well as the use of different subsidy schemes created important conditions for a **social mix** of residents.

Concepts of participation in the planning, construction and utilisation stages are a priority in almost all evaluated projects. Differences can be observed in their “scope”, that is whether participation is rather intended in the planning phase and/or in later utilisation, as well as in the degree of participation meaning in which kind of issues the residents are involved.

The form of **caretaking** is also already taken account of in the planning of most of the projects. The different models observed range from caretakers being on site to internal caretakers (one resident takes on the task of caretaking) to addressing the question of caretaking in the participation process.

Mobility concepts can be found in all projects, but are for the most part not very innovative. Only one project includes the use of a carsharing model. The reduction of mobility requirements by locally integrating functions like housing, services and recreation was taken into account in one project by providing an integrated consumer market and in two projects by creating rentable office space.

Recommendations for action

Following the so far positive results, the first recommendation is to retain the concept of “social sustainability” in the pillar model.

Social sustainability is a cross-cutting issue and should always be considered in connection with the other three pillars – “architecture”, “economy” and “ecology”. As the list of criteria adds to its clarity, the evaluators regard it as a helpful tool. Several criteria could be formulated more precisely or could include recommendations and benchmarks (e.g. sufficient storage space), which would make a subsequent review easier. At the same time, a too narrow definition of the individual criteria involves the risk of losing room for manoeuvre in the planning phase, which can have negative effects on the quality of the housing construction projects and could make further developing the criteria in line with current social developments difficult.

Integration into and connection to the surrounding urban space are an important factor for social sustainability. That is why the surroundings of the housing complex should be taken into account in the list of criteria or in the quality assessment by the jury and the architectural “response” to these surroundings should be assessed.

The assessment of the **jury** of the competition is in part largely based on the respective priorities established for the projects. A more comprehensive consideration and taking account of all criteria of social sustainability could help prevent that important elements of socially sustainable residential construction are overlooked.

In addition, the following recommendations for action can be taken into consideration:

- Multidimensional understanding of **accessibility** and thus taking account of different types of disability.
- Greater consideration of **noise nuisance** by providing a coordinated management of the use of common rooms as well as increased mediation.
- More attention should be paid to alternative **mobility concepts** as well as to the reduction of mobility requirements.
- Increased involvement of the **Gebietsbetreuungen (area renewal offices)** already in the planning phase insofar as they exist in the respective districts.
- **Artistic interventions** can make a significant contribution to the residents’ identification with the housing area. Involving the residents, however, is an important requirement.