

Is it worth it?

Pre-study
by design for all
for
Magistratsabteilung 50,
Wohnbauförderung und
Schlichtungsstelle für
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Angelegenheiten
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Opportunities of accessible renovation of residential housing in Vienna

Two fundamental questions were at the start of this study: What does accessible residential housing actually cost if taken in the context of city development, healthcare and care for the elderly? And would targeted funding of renovation for accessible housing be profitable for the city and its inhabitants in the long-term?

Answering these questions exhaustively would by far exceed the scope of this study. Our goal was to create evidence for a decision whether, or in what form accessible renovation should be further pursued by the City.

In interviews with representatives of all relevant departments of the City of Vienna and with external experts for care, building, health and finances we identified the core subject areas. An extensive review of national and international literature focused on structures and models that incorporate the complex relationships between

the built environment, social services and healthcare.

To start with, the study investigated the current setting

in Vienna regarding accessible housing and care, the legal context of construction as well as equal treatment policies.

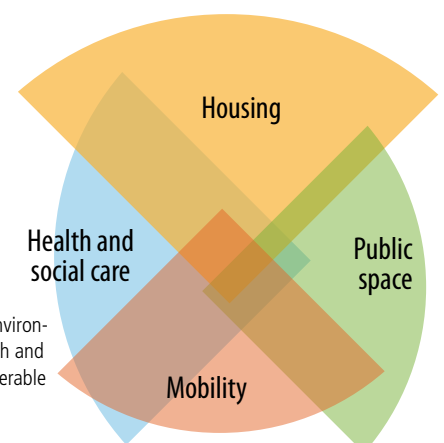
Integrating residential housing and the built environment

Affordable living in accessible environments is among the most important elements of a successful city. The OECD recommends that this should be assessed on three indicators: housing, availability of home care services and access to public

transport (and by extension to employment and public and private services).

This is in accordance with what senior citizens define as quality of life: staying in the neighbourhood, cultivating social contacts – but not necessarily staying in their own (old) home. The deciding factor is not only an accessible apartment. Shops, pharmacies, doctors, the citizen centre, or cafés are just as important, if not more so. Therefore it is not surprising that old neighbourhoods are more popular than newly built areas in the city, but it is the old city that poses the greatest challenges for providing accessible housing.

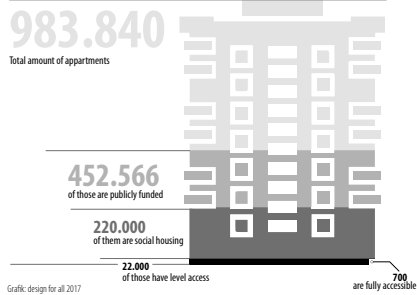
Ageing cities should take a comprehensive approach, integrating economic and social policies. (OECD)



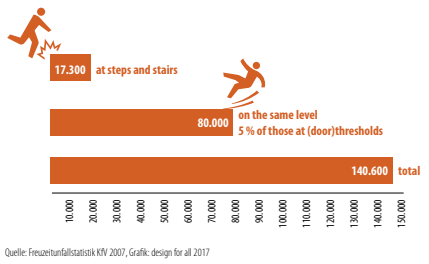
Housing, the built environment, mobility, health and social care are inseparable aspects of the city.

Apartments in Vienna

Source: Statistik Austria, Wiener Wohnen

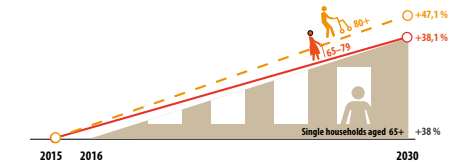


Accidents of over 60 year olds in Austria



Age and housing

Increase of senior citizens 2015-2030
and of single households 2016-2030



Sources: Österreich 2025 – Pflegevorsorge – Künftiger Finanzierungsaufwand und regionalwirtschaftliche Verflechtungen und Ausbau der stationären Pflege in den Bundesländern, 2017; Quantitative und qualitative Effekte des Einsatzes öffentlicher Mittel im Vergleich zur mobilen Pflege, 2014
Grafik design for all 2017

Accessible housing and environments are major contributing factors towards fall prevention, and safety and feeling secure are among the most important issues of independent living in old age.

On the current waiting list for accessible housing in Vienna there are 140 applications for senior housing and 81 for “barrier free” housing. This is surprising, given the fact that there are 252.123 persons (13,5 %) with mobility impairments and 9.338 wheelchair users (0,5 %) in the city.

People with a disability have no explicit right to accessible housing, but the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities and anti-discrimination legislation in the Austrian constitution give substance to the right to choose a place of residence. The scope of Austrian anti-discrimination legislation (Bundesbehindertengleichstellungsgesetz BGStG) is also in the process of being reviewed to include the right to removal of barriers (instead of monetary compensation), injunction suits and joint law suits.

It can be expected that these changes in legislation will exert some pressure on building regulations. For instance, „Konsensschutz“ (existing buildings do not have to be updated to current building standards) often stands in the way of creating accessibility. There have been instances, though, when this was repealed in the public interest for safety reasons.

Should it not be possible to create full accessibility, there is little evidence at the moment that would help formulate new planning guidance for improvements.

Grants framework and funding

What is the relationship between various forms of building subsidies and grants, what is their effect and how could they be improved?

In privately financed housing there is little motivation to renovate unless it is profitable – a simple cost-benefit calculation. If grants are available, they will be used up to the last cent, but nothing more. Currently there are only monetary incentives. Accessibility should be defined as state of the art improvement just like ecological factors and assessed as an integral part of building quality evaluation.

Applications from private individuals for home improvement grants remains way behind expectations, and thus fewer appartement renovations take place. Changes to the application framework and a more active information policy could kick off a rapid change. At the moment grant applications from persons

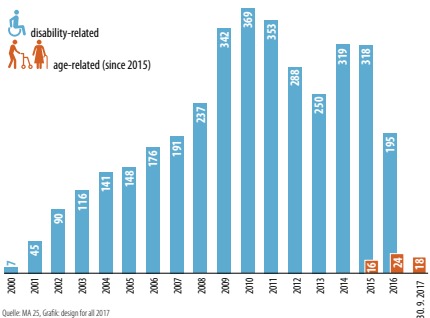
The quality of home improvement makes the difference, not who applies for it.

would like to take preventive measures have to be turned back. Lifting this restriction and turning towards a grant model that looks for qualities of build rather than personal circumstance could instigate a positive trend in the housing market. Effectively the subsidised measures would have to fulfill certain basic quality criteria.

In order to define these qualities and framework conditions, qualitative and quantitative data from previous subsidised home renovations could be evaluated.

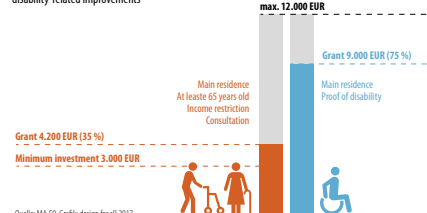
Grants 2000 – 2016

Grants received for accessibility-related improvements



Grants for accessibility improvements

Different criteria for age-related and disability-related improvements



A complicated grant application process for individuals does not help matters, as illustrated in the diagram below. Here the differentiation between “age” and “disability” does not make any sense at all. To a large extent the requirements for both groups are the same. Simplifying this process with cooperation across the city departments for housing, building and social care could also have a positive effect on the cost of administration.

The framework for grant-assisted improvements for individuals that are universally helpful to all other residents, should also be brought to a more integrated solution. Such adaptations to the building currently remain in the ownership of the individual, with all legal and financial consequences. Combining single applications from several residents of the same building are also complicated within the current system, each application has to be treated separately.

Positive examples and reliable data

Is it at all possible to renovate to a high quality within cost restrictions? The simple answer is given by the city itself: yes. Vienna has examples of high quality renovations within the grant budget. They can be found on the website of Wohnfonds Wien. Unfortunately, “barrier-free” is again treated as a separate category. From a resident’s point of view these apartments have the best possible living quality for everyone. Therefore, quality criteria should be in the forefront of presenting these projects, they should not be pigeon-holed as “disability”-housing.

This mechanism of separation can be observed in the construction and property business as a whole. If property developers tell us that “wheelchair apartments” are also refused by “healthy” buyers or tenants, and at least the bathrooms have to be remodeled, then there is something seriously wrong with the design and marketing of these properties. An accessible appartement affords space for all generations and requirements, and this is not a sales argument?

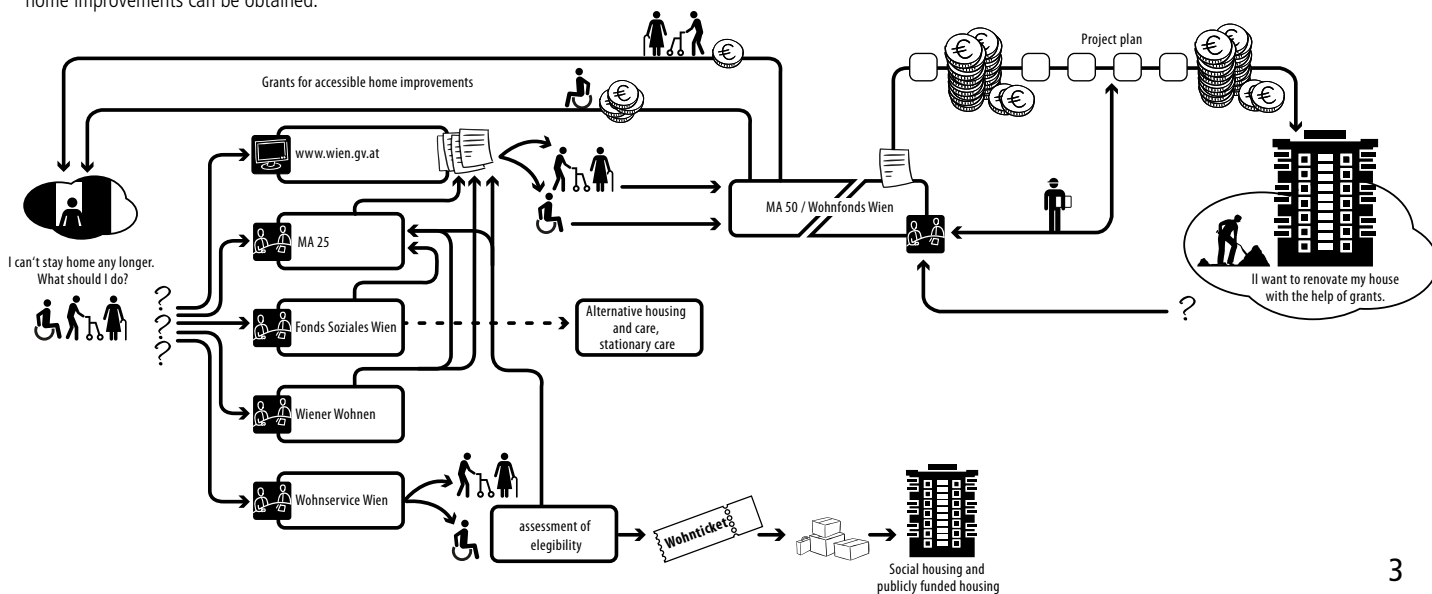
Housing technology has also arrived in the digital age, and there is no reason why modern digital networks should not be prepared for assistive systems in the course of renovation.

There is a general lack of awareness that accessibility means better quality for all, and that an extended understanding of sustainability leads to greater comfort and increase of property value.

Reducing barriers in existing buildings is particularly challenging in housing stock built from the 1950s to the 1980s. Focusing on these properties would be sensible, but requires good planning guidance derived from reliable, cross-departmental data. This would mean evaluation of building and layout types in combination with residents’ living environments.

Focusing on housing stock from the 1950s- the 1980s and their systematic assessment.

For individuals it’s not easy to understand how grants for home improvements can be obtained.



Holistic models

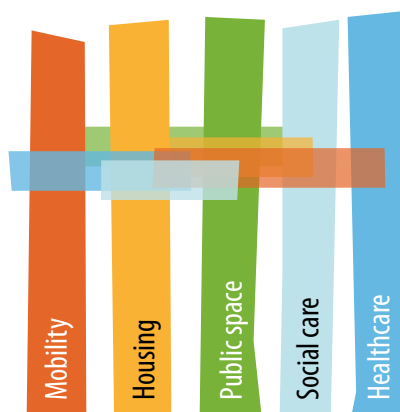
What models of governance can we learn from, where can we begin to make Vienna future-proof?

Looking at international examples, it is remarkable that many individual measures mentioned in other countries that are shining beacons for accessibility also exist in Vienna. This includes for instance: care subsidies that are not tied to a specific purpose; personal grants for renovation; funding of assistive devices; housing advice centres; inner city grants; a legal framework for accessible buildings. So it can't be the sum of single measures that decides whether policies are successful and future-proof.

The significant difference seems to be the coordination of activities and the basic attitude towards inclusion and accessibility in all decisions.

Our perception from the interviews and research was also reflected by OECD findings. We need a universal approach that integrates economic and social aspects of ageing, with horizontal governance structures to overcome policy "silos" and bring together housing, healthcare, urban infrastructure, public transport, employment and urban form.

Qualitative models such as Post Occupancy Evaluation could be used for evaluating existing positive examples to create benchmarks for high quality renovation. For a universal assessment of a renovation project, the accompaniment with a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis should be considered.



Next steps

Based on the potential that was identified, we propose the following actions to further investigate the value of accessible renovation of existing housing in Vienna.

1. Compound the evidence

Qualitative and quantitative assessment of accessible housing renovations through individual grants:

- What was renovated and how? Assessment of the qualities of the projects. Knowledge about qualities of planning and of the types of products used can improve the quality of advice to citizens and help assess future projects.
- Development of quality standards. These requirements have to be applicable to a variety of situations.

Evaluation of accessibility in residential housing built between 1950 and 1990, focusing on social housing and subsidised housing:

- Definition and assessment of key situations.
- Analysis of renovation needs and costs.

Analysis of qualitative aspects of completed projects:

- Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) of selected projects and the effects of renovation for residents.

Accompaniment and analysis of a new project with a universal approach:

- Identification of suitable projects for Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis.

Taking a close look at current subsidy and grant frameworks:

- Prepare recommendations for reducing legal and organisational barriers.
- Simplification of access to individual grants.

2. Economic research

Extensive ROI analysis of renovation projects incorporating social care, healthcare and mobility as cost factors for the city of Vienna.

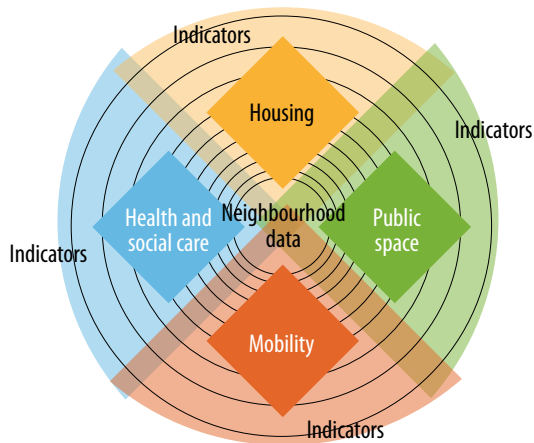
What are the alternatives? What is the result in the context of demographic change if we do not improve access and accessible use qualities of residential housing?

Modelling the effects of structural change in administration and financing.

One methodological scenario

In the course of this study the team could not help but look ahead and sketch out a method for visualising and assessing qualities of an urban environment. The „Grätzlquadrant“ (neighbourhood quadrant – working title) is based on four relevant fields of action. For each field indicators and values have to be developed. It is possible that the indicators receive different emphasis depending on the area the quadrant is applied to. In this way the idiosyncrasies of a neighbourhood can be taken into account.

A baseline scenario results from the data assessment and evaluation of the current status in the area as described above. Current and desired status are mapped onto the quadrant. The visualisation creates comparability between neighbourhoods, highlights the need for action and functions as a basis for policy strategies.



The „Neighbourhood-Quadrant“ as a tool for universal urban development.

Conclusion

It is not the sum of single measures but the coordination of activities as well as attitudes towards inclusion and accessibility that are the fabric of successful and future-proof policies. Cooperation across departmental boundaries between social services, housing, building and planning could lead to significant improvements. This will directly impact on the quality of living space and help create a long-term framework for a successful ageing city.

Subsequent activities should focus on the housing stock built between 1950 and 1990. Assessment and evaluation of all grant-aided home improvements and accessible renovations should create the foundations for the development of guidelines for planning and an updated grant system. Social effects of renovation should be evaluated across departments and applied as indicators for project assessment and the disbursement of funds.

We need to transform the perception of accessibility. Targeted communication of use qualities and positive examples for all players in the housing industry will contribute to this goal. Quality features, non-stigmatising criteria included in information material about properties should increase demand and rentability/saleability.

Beyond monetary grants the accessibility of a building could be integrated in building value assessments just like energy saving or building technology. To increase acceptance, legislative barriers and uncertainties should also be reduced. For building owners incentives have to include awareness-raising as well as financing, in the knowledge that for the construction industry cost is always the leading argument. A combination of quality requirements in construction and the prospect of better building revenue could be the way to go.

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