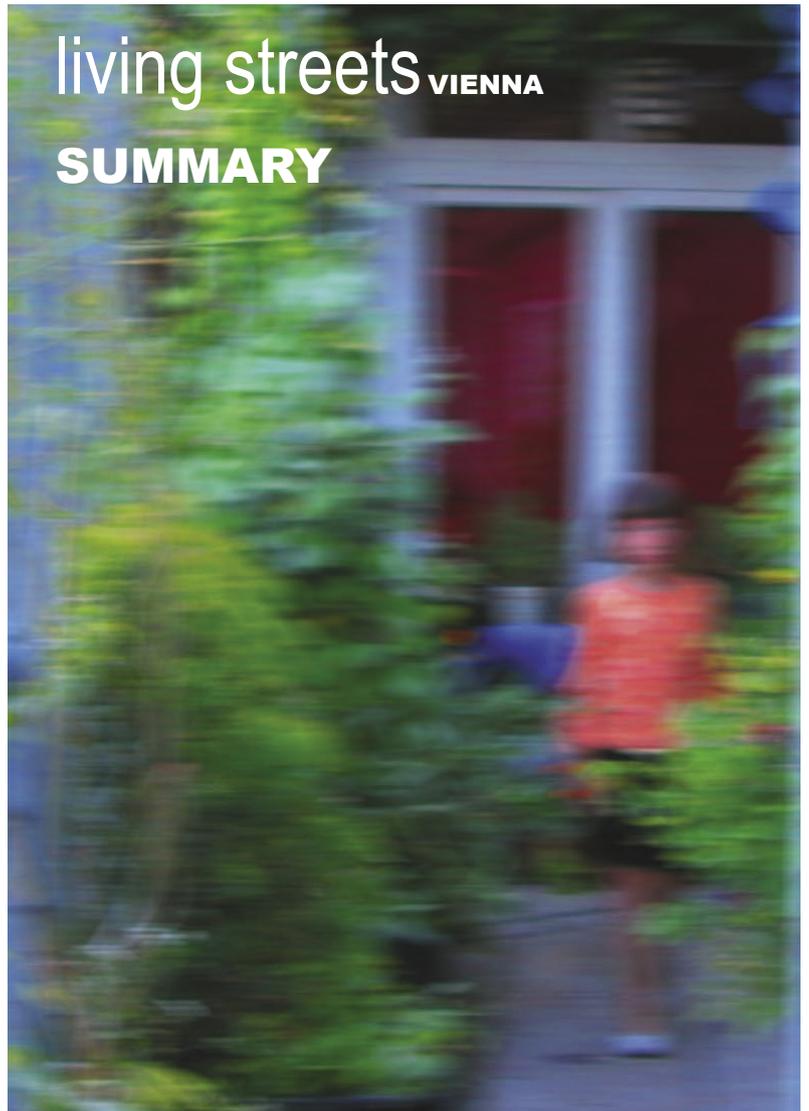


living streets VIENNA

**SUMMARY**



## summary

### **preface**

The main focus of this investigation on six housing estates in Vienna lies on the ideas people have of collaborative neighbourhood life and of communal use of access areas.

Furthermore a precise analysis of housing estates that stand out as lively communities is supposed to shed light on the significance of edificial and spatial qualities for the development of collaborative neighbourhoods. In this context the typology of the access balcony seems to be of particular importance.

### **streets in the air**

During the industrialisation the access balcony has developed mainly as a method to economically organise large numbers of small units in multi storey housing.

Early-on social reformers have tried to develop this access typology not only economically but also as a way to generate a social life within the housing estates. The *Familistères* Jean Baptiste Godin<sup>1</sup> built in Guise for instance are one of the first examples of social housing where a central court yard is presented as the communal heart of the estate encircled on several levels by access balconies and apartments facing onto this court yard.

The image of the street as a manifest of social neighbourhood life inspired the theory of the *Re-identification Grid* the Peter and Alison Smithson presented in 1953 at the CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence. The definition of the street as extension of the house was the basis of their projects *Golden Lane Housing* and later *Robin Hood Gardens*, which they built in London in 1972. Decks running along the facade of the upper levels of this housing estate were since then called *streets in the air*.<sup>2</sup> In the projects of our investigation the architects have tried in different ways to develop the ‚street‘ as an area of social interaction in multi storey housing.

We have assumed that most people feel the desire to develop social contacts and also friendships within their neighbourhood. Therefore we not only investigated on typological characteristics but also surveyed the inhabitants of the housing estates about their needs and opinions.

It is the balance between openness and seclusion of the apartment but also of the whole neighbourhood that plays a critical part for the quality of the access areas. This balance can not only be described on the level of the building as it also depends on the habits of the inhabitants. Our investigation makes clear that on the one hand spatial deficiencies can be adjusted by the social commitment of the people but on the other hand spatial qualities alone can not guarantee for a lively neighbourhood.

### **the projects**

The edificial characteristics of the investigated projects are based on very different concepts. Nevertheless they have in common that the apartments are organised around conjointly used access areas.

The *Apollo*gasse apartment house is an example of the *Pawlatschenhaus*<sup>3</sup> as it was built for 19th Century working class people. Today the inhabitants live together in an atmosphere that depends on the dedication of the individual towards the very narrow access balconies that are in spite of shortage of space used for communal outdoor habitation.

The apartment house *Miss Sargfabrik* shows a contemporary version of the old *Pawlatschenhaus* typology that develops its positive spatial aspects to a new quality. Deliberate widenings and recesses of the access balcony are not conceived as private exterior spaces specifically assigned to certain apartments but as fluent and open areas the inhabitants conjointly take in possession

The roofed passage spaces of the *Zschokkegasse* housing estate show a certain resemblance to the court yard spaces of the *Familistères* in Guise. The passages act as access spaces for the apartments but also and at the same time as huge communal spaces the inhabitants use for events and parties. In contrast to the *Familistères* the apartments in this housing estate are generously provided with balconies and terraces. Daily life therefore unfolds mainly hidden in private spaces.

The galleries of the housing estates in *Satzingerweg* and *Gschwandnergasse* explicitly join areas for access and niches for private habitation. Private balconies and access galleries lay open next to one another. Each recess is assigned to a certain apartment but can also be perceived as a widening of the access area.

The isolation of private terraces and public access balconies is taken again a step further in the housing estate *Breitenfurter Straße*. Although these two areas lay next to one another they are separated by a garden fence and gate. The access balcony itself is a straight path with no spatial qualities to enhance it as a neighbourly meeting place but it is visually connected to the private terraces, that lay between access balcony and the apartments.

<sup>1</sup> In the middle of the 19th Century the industrialist Jean Baptiste Godin put into practice an experiment of social utopia influenced by Fournier and Saint-Simon. For the workers of his factory he built a housing complex that disposed of all kinds of social facilities and was meant to become an example of a harmonic society. The complex was run cooperatively until 1968 and is a museum today. [www.familistere.com](http://www.familistere.com)

<sup>2</sup> The expression streets in the air was a counterdraft to the *rue interieur* that LeCorbusier had established for the interior hallway in the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille, that had been built shortly before.

<sup>3</sup> *Pawlatschen*: czech *pavlač* = balcony

*Pawlatschenhaus*: house with access balconies

## Results

Very important for the contentment of the inhabitants is their sensation to live in an exceptional housing estate. This sensation is only partly generated by the conciseness and singularity of the architectural design. More important seem to be possibilities for the inhabitants to take part in shaping their proximate surroundings. Notably people like to get involved with gardening. The more lively the vegetation is in the housing estates the more content are its inhabitants.

Significant for the development of a lively neighbourhood and a positive atmosphere is also the size and scale of the estate. The bigger estates of this investigation were described less lively by their inhabitants and seemed to us less adequate to support a collaborative neighbourhood than the smaller estates whose inhabitants get to know each other much easier.

Furthermore the atmosphere in the housing estates of our research is dependant on the existence of private exterior spaces. Inhabitants with own balconies are less active in a communal neighbourhood life. Although most people express the wish for private balconies it has to be said that these are mostly rather obstructive for the development of a lively neighbourhood, for it is mainly the access area where accidental meetings of the inhabitants occur. The more private balconies, terraces or gardens an estate has, the less do the access areas function for different activities of the inhabitants. If access areas mainly get used as storage places they tend to become subordinate and unattractive. An open apartment layout that allows visual interactions between private and communal spaces can counteract this and improve spatial qualities of the access areas.

The location of access areas within the housing estate has an influence on the development of communal spaces. Are access balcony, court yard or passage built to form the heart of the estate and apartments organised around it the access areas have best spatial preconditions to become meeting places of the inhabitants. The projects of this study show high quality examples of how access areas can be spatially integrated and harmonise with everyday movements of the people through their neighbourhood.

Housing concepts that emphasize collaborative neighbourhoods are especially conform to the access typologies of the investigated projects. The access balcony is a place of informal neighbourly contacts where different activities happen at the same time and people meet unintentionally. The inhabitants we surveyed expressed by the majority the wish for a neighbourhood that relies on lively but rather informal contacts. They want to personally know their neighbours and have the occasional talk but they avoid forced activities and contacts. Most of the inhabitants surveyed are in search for a habitation that lies between collaborative footing and personal freedom. Inhabitants who use the access balcony as extension of their apartment come close to this ideal for they themselves controll whether to open up to communal spaces or to retreat to private areas of the apartment. Many inhabitants have the feeling that conjointly used access areas are especially applicable to develop an informal neighbourhood life.

In housing we have to act on the assumption of heterogenous groups of inhabitants as the nuclear family today is just one of many life scripts. Furthermore inhabitants are often mixed together from many different cultural and social backgrounds. On their search for a collaborative habitation people do not wish to be forced into communal rules but live their individual life. The task to combine communal and individual needs and desires is a major aspect of housing today. The projects of this investigation in different ways offer concepts for these contemporary developments.

It is not only the commitment of the inhabitants but significantly the spatial characteristics that generate the qualities of habitation when they satisfy the main use of the areas we were investigating: the everyday walk along the access balcony.

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