

# Housing and Social Cohesion Programme in Vienna in Comparison with other European Cities (StaeV)

Commissioned by Vienna Housing Research / Wiener Wohnbauforschung

## Summary

The City of Vienna explicitly sees itself in the European context of “learning from one another” and wants to use it pro-actively for a comparative check of its policy, in this case housing policy.

It was anticipated that this project comparing Vienna’s housing policy strategies and development programmes with those of up to fifteen European cities would provide pointers and suggestions as to how the excellent position of Vienna in numerous rankings and studies can be maintained in a targeted manner – with simultaneous openness for forward-looking innovations. The emphasis is on stimulation, on pointing out questions that have perhaps previously received too little attention and on promising answers. The aim is to become inspired but also to see where Vienna can be in the vanguard.

The research which forms the basis of this report is intended to provide a small building block and easier structural access to information which can be used for future work.

### ***Was it worthwhile? – Outline of the research and achievable results***

This can be answered in advance: yes, it was worthwhile. However, ‘big **surprises** about content’ were **not found**. This is also a first result.

**The chosen focus** on the theme of ‘housing’ in the context of ‘social cohesion’ and other aspects of quality of life **was fruitful** in viewing the cities. The team was able to collect **around 750 pointers**, two thirds of them about methods or measures and one third about various kinds of illuminating examples.

Understandably this figure is **only a very general pointer** towards relevant information. It is the result of a long process of balancing expansion and reduction but in any case shows that there is extensive engagement with housing policy in very many cities.

However, the research findings can in no way be taken as information about the real extent and the true quality of the individual housing policies of the various cities. They remain random due to widely varying degrees of access to information.

Interpretation of the material is first and foremost left to the reader. The role of collecting and ordering was stipulated in the project but some analysis should be provided and suggestions made:

The findings were **as to be expected**. One city or another dares to go a little further forward here or there and this can encourage Vienna. However, this is not yet to be found so much on the level of programmes, targets and sub-targets but rather with their measures and methods – therefore more in smaller-scale approaches.

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### ***The 'Positioning' of Vienna***

A kind of mainstream was identified in terms of the thematic emphases in housing and urban development programmes which cities follow *nolens volens* – maintaining the status quo. There is little space for vision. Holding on to what has been achieved and a return to 'affordability' are at the fore.

Faced with very similar challenges, the cities' programmatic answers cover several groups of targets and are very alike including their details. They start from the **general issue of satisfying housing need**, especially under the premise of **affordability**, and include programmes for **urban renewal, housing for target groups, ecology** and the **neighbourhood environment**.

**Focal points** which most of the cities have in common can also be seen within these groups. Put very simply, meeting demand is dominated by the design of comprehensive programmes to steer urban growth and conversion projects. The creation of alliances and the use of bundles of instruments aim to make housing more affordable. The elderly are evidently the target group given most attention and are specially catered for. Urban renewal, which has been in the mainstream for a long time, is becoming more varied and open. Ecology in construction mostly concentrates on energy efficiency and the neighbourhood environment is continuing to gain importance.

Some dominant cross-cutting issues can be identified such as **participation, comprehensive cooperation** and **horizontally oriented approaches**.

*How can Vienna see itself positioned in this context?*

The **Viennese approach** is very **well anchored** in this identified focus. To put it plainly, it seems that Vienna jumps on the bandwagon of every trend. It is even noticeable that Vienna has a very wide-ranging programme, like few others. It is present in more or less all fields.

### ***Learning and Inspiration***

But how can Vienna continue learning and gain inspiration from what others do? Some identified cross-cutting issues are more strongly pronounced in some cities than in others – such as **monitoring and evaluation**. In Vienna too there still appear to be some opportunities for development – and more monitoring of the wide-ranging everyday implementation could be contemplated.

The same applies to **prevention**. Here Vienna is in some fields an internationally recognised trailblazer. However, with regard to the earliest possible counter measures before a housing situation arises which is too difficult to control, there are certainly still stimuli to be found in other cities. This is touched upon in the report.

**Integrated sustainability** (social, economic and ecological) should serve as a benchmark and can play a still wider role in housing.

*What else was discovered in the detail?*

The other main achievement of the project – the comprehensive collection of methods, measures and 'good' examples – is too wide-ranging to distil into just a few sentences. In comparison with the predominant harmony of targets and sub-targets the cities' by all means display a **wide array of measures and methods**.

The chosen approach was to further **structure and bundle** the large mass of 750 pieces of information beyond the classification of aims so as to enable targeted access.

What could also be done was to filter the hundreds of comments and select those that were in any way 'notable', that aroused curiosity or were possibly new. These finally became **around a hundred 'teasers'** to stimulate further interest.

The proposal is to use this analysis with the 'teasers' and the extensive 'card index' (table sections and sources) as a **fund for learning and inspiration**. Readers are recommended to inform themselves further via the sources where a broader trend or a single reference arouses their interest.

Some of the **examples in the tables** provide the opportunity to form an opinion on the basis of the implementation of measures. However, it should not be forgotten that programmes and not implementation and its successes formed the content of this project. To measure the latter would be another project.

Chapters A, B.1 and B.2 of the report deal with the issues and the targets, chapter B.3 contains the analysis of the methods, measures and examples as well as the grids arranged according to topics with information. The supplementary list of sources is in the appendix. The final chapter (B.4) summarises the suggestions for Vienna in an excursus on large and small-scale approaches.

***Vienna as Vanguard and Motor***

In the same way that it can give Vienna courage to see what can be achieved in other cities, the example of Vienna can also serve others. As can be seen, Vienna positions itself well among the cities. And in certain respects the city is also sometimes right at the forefront and deals with issues that other cities currently do not.

Just one keyword among many is ecology in housing – the passive house, low energy etc. New forms of cooperation to stimulate housing construction and increase quality have been tested. A single model is not appropriate in all cases and there is room for further thought but it can also serve other cities. With regard to gender-oriented planning and implementation in housing there is more to be seen in Vienna than other cities but a new impulse here or there would be interesting. The 'flexibility' of apartments and apartment houses has obviously been further considered in Vienna. 'Group living' in Viennese subsidised housing construction as a further development of the principal of joint building ventures is also an innovative approach.

Even if no other concrete impulses are taken from this 'tour d'horizon' it is hoped that at least one thing can be reinforced, the desire for the new and for going further. A final appeal: go beyond borders!