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# **The role of the local institutional context in understanding collaborative housing models: empirical evidence from Austria**

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the institutional context influences the configuration of collaborative housing models in Austria. Although Austria has a well-established cooperative sector, few empirical studies and no comprehensive overviews have been published on collaborative housing. This paper aims to fill this research gap by extending existing work on organisational models within Austrian non-profit housing. The contribution reports original research based on qualitative expert interviews and case studies completed in 2015. We focus our empirical analysis on two local housing contexts with current collaborative housing activity, Vienna and Salzburg. Our findings highlight the importance of partnerships with large cooperatives and the key role of local authorities for the development of collaborative housing initiatives. The main contributions of the paper can be seen in feeding into on-going international comparative research on collaborative housing sectors and on the changing institutional landscapes of housing systems.

## Key words

collaborative housing, international comparisons, cooperative housing, self-build housing, cohousing; Austria

## 1. Introduction

In the wake of an economic crisis followed by the search for innovative solutions to provide new affordable housing, cooperative and community-oriented housing initiatives seem to have gained importance over the last few years in several European countries (e.g. Moore & McKee, 2012; id22, 2012; Moreau & Pittini, 2012; Lang & Mullins, 2015). Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, research debates on these housing models are still weakly connected within Europe (Lang & Roessl, 2013; Tummers, 2015). Furthermore, the literature has so far only offered limited typologies which integrate traditional cooperative and new participatory as well as community-oriented models in regional housing contexts (e.g. Rowlands, 2009; Minora, Mullins & Jones, 2013). Against this background, the paper intends to contribute to comparative studies within the European research community by adding empirical evidence on collaborative housing in the under-researched country context of Austria.

We use ‘collaborative housing’ in this study as an umbrella term which stretches across different forms of participatory and community-oriented housing (Fromm, 2012). We believe that this reflects the nature of an emerging housing sector in Austria in which organisations cannot be primarily defined by the traditional principles of the cooperative or cohousing movement, nor by their purely community-led nature. The key concern of organisations and projects in a ‘collaborative housing sector’ rather seems to be that their housing provision is oriented towards the collaboration of residents among each other (Vestbro, 2010).

Although Austria has a well-established non-profit housing sector and a long tradition of housing cooperatives, present-day cooperative housing has to be regarded as a distinct housing model, separate to collaborative housing. In the early days, both models were clearly overlapping, but over time, cooperatives have become synonymous with large-scale, top-down housing provision that recent collaborative housing activity is a reaction to. Collaborative approaches have again attracted increasing public attention in recent years. Particularly in Vienna, there has been a political interest and some state promotion for so-called *Baugemeinschaften*. However, collaborative housing activity in Austria cannot be reduced to a single model or location. The variety of locally-based organisations and projects is reflected in the existence of an Austrian-wide umbrella association called *the Initiative*

for *Collaborative Building and Housing*<sup>1</sup>, which apart from *Baugruppen* or *Baugemeinschaften* also represents cohousing as well as self-help initiatives, and covers both urban and rural housing schemes.

Nevertheless, compared to social housing more generally, hardly any academic literature or theory-informed research has so far been published on the collaborative housing sector in Austria as described above. Furthermore, the few existing empirical studies in this field either focused entirely on the Vienna city region or on selected fields of collaborative housing activity, such as *Baugruppen* or *Baugemeinschaften* (e.g. Temel, Lorbek, Ptaszyńska, & Wittinger, 2009) and Cohousing (Wankiewicz, 2015). This paper aims to fill this research gap by presenting results of an empirical study completed in 2015, thereby extending existing work on organisational models within non-profit and cooperative housing in Austria (Lang & Novy, 2014).

In analogy to the cooperative movement, we would hypothesise that the concrete meaning and configuration of collaborative housing models differs between localities and over time; as it is shaped by the institutional context of housing and welfare (Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Moreau & Pittini, 2012; Lang & Roessl, 2013). Therefore, this paper applies a context-sensitive approach to investigate how the institutional context of housing policy influences the development of collaborative housing models in Austria. Based on a structured literature review and qualitative, case-study oriented research, this article contrasts experiences from collaborative housing initiatives in the two Austrian provinces, and respective provincial capitals and municipalities of Vienna and Salzburg.

While available research on Austria as a case study has laid strong emphasis upon central state and provincial housing policy (e.g. IIBW, 2009), classifying Austria as a conservative housing (and welfare) ‘regime’ (Matznetter, 2002), the activities at the level of local governments are a notoriously under researched area. Available case studies on the housing policies of municipal governments is somewhat biased towards social housing in the city of Vienna, which recently has been investigated from a comparative perspective (Lawson, 2010). Vienna, however, is hardly representative of a conservative housing regime, as it is characterised by one of the highest levels of state intervention in housing in Europe, which is reflected in generous housing subsidies and a large council housing sector. By contrast, there has been less academic research about the housing related measures of other municipalities. Moreover, housing research in Austria is somewhat ‘insular’, establishing only weak linkages to the theoretically informed international literature in the field of housing and urban studies.

The structure of this paper is as follows: In the next section, we present our theoretical framework which is based on a housing systems approach. In section 3, the methodology of the empirical study is outlined. Section 4 provides an overview on the institutional context of housing in Austria before we go into the case studies of collaborative housing activity in particular local contexts in sections 5 and 6. Section 7 finally discusses the results of our study against the background of the research gaps identified, summarises the key findings, and provides conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This paper applies a housing systems approach, enriched by an organisational fields’ perspective, to study collaborative housing practice in Austria. Housing systems consist of ‘organised parts that interact in space and time’ (van der Heijden, Dol, & Oxley, 2011, p. 302). Crucial parts within every housing system are *demand*, *supply* and the *wider institutional context*. Regarding the demand side, households are the most relevant actors. On the supply side, agents supplying housing and housing related services, such as non-profit landlords, private providers etc. must be considered. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Initiative für gemeinschaftliches Bauen und Wohnen* (see also [www.gemeinsam-bauen-wohnen.org](http://www.gemeinsam-bauen-wohnen.org))

institutional context relates to housing policy interventions in the form of regulations and subsidies as well as to cultural norms and values. (van der Heijden et al., 2011) Regulations either enable collaborative housing initiatives by establishing favourable rules and standards or have a constraining effect, if they discourage innovative housing developments. Subsidies, e.g. in the form of direct producer subsidies, are crucial for collaborative housing initiatives, as they facilitate the provision of housing by way of reducing the costs of housing production and by leveraging additional private finance.

Theoretically informed housing policy research has placed emphasis on studying and comparing the role of central state institutions, foregrounding the importance of welfare regimes and central state housing policies as well as their linkages. This focus is critically important, as it has led to considerable progress in understanding the similarities and differences of housing policies across Europe. The relationship between collaborative housing and the welfare regime context is another relevant aspect, which has so far not attracted much attention from international housing researchers. As a preliminary hypothesis, it can be assumed that welfare states with less generous transfer systems may increase the pressure to set up collaborative housing initiatives as means to generate affordable housing.

Recent strands of thinking challenge the established understanding of housing (policy) systems as homogeneous entities shaped by strong national legislation. Instead, scholars are becoming more alert to changing state roles in housing policy, referring to the notion of multi-level state structures. The key argument is that across Europe and beyond there has been a strong tendency to devolve lead powers from the nation state to lower state levels, resulting in an enhanced role of regional and in particular local governments in policy-making. At the same time, however, some responsibilities have remained at the national level and are unlikely to be devolved. The local level attracts considerable attention, as it is supposed to provide a locus for policy experiments, (social) innovation and new forms of direct involvement of the citizens (e.g. Obinger, 2005; Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

An approach that emphasises multi-level state structures has some key advantages justifying its application (Kendall, 2009; Hooghe & Marks, 2003). Firstly, while refusing the exclusive focus on the central state level, it better takes into account the responsibilities of the different tiers of government and their main housing policy measures. Secondly, it acknowledges the heterogeneity of regional and local housing policies, with regions and municipalities often emphasising different policy priorities. Hence, a stronger focus is placed on assessing policy variations within single countries rather than between them, and on their impacts on collaborative housing developments. This implies that the regional and the local state levels are increasingly replacing the national state as the main unit of comparative analysis.

Given our research question for the empirical research in this paper, two particular features of housing systems seem to be relevant to consider:

- *Local housing system*: This is due to substantial devolution in the Austrian housing system which has strengthened the role of provinces (*Bundesländer*) and cities in designing housing policy and housing subsidy schemes. As a consequence, these subnational authorities are now having considerable scope for the development of policies to promote collaborative housing initiatives. The other side of the coin is that devolution can result in spatial variation regarding the kind and extent of public support available to collaborative housing. Moreover, locally embedded norms of cooperation may enhance the emergence and the stability of collaborative housing initiatives.

- *Multi-level housing system*: Collaborative housing initiatives looking for support (e.g. in the form of subsidies) may be forced to approach different levels of the state in order to convince public authorities of their proposed housing projects. This requires the ability to understand complicated multi-level structures and to take advantage of the support they offer, using ‘social skill’, i.e. the ‘cognitive capacity for reading people and environments, framing lines of action and mobilising people’ (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p. 17f). Therefore, multi-level systems can be understood as both a challenge and an opportunity for collaborative housing initiatives. Austria’s multi-level housing system is particularly complicated, as by contrast to Vienna, the other regional capitals are limited in designing their own housing policies. Whilst Vienna has a privileged position as being one of the nine Austrian provinces, the situation e.g. for the city of Salzburg within the multi-level housing system is slightly different.

Within the housing systems approach, we further put an emphasis on the elements of supply and the wider institutional framework. As for the *supply-side dimension*, we look at the configuration of the organisational field of collaborative housing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), focusing on the roles and practices of housing providers, such as resident-led *Baugruppen* but also large-scale cooperative providers as their practices influence collaborative housing activity. The analysis of *the institutional framework* has to focus on the regulatory and subsidy frameworks at different state levels and on norms relevant for collaborative housing initiatives.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper applies a multi-level analysis of collaborative housing, integrating a territorial, institutional perspective with an organisational view. This approach is based on the insight that housing organisations evolve in a historically and geographically situated way and in return can also shape the institutional framework through their practices (Giddens, 1984; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

As collaborative housing is a relatively new and still under-researched phenomenon, a qualitative, multiple-case study design of local housing systems appears suitable to reconstruct its meaning in a concrete institutional and territorial context (Sayer, 1992; Yin, 2009). Thus, based on a literature review and expert interviews, two local urban contexts have been identified as suitable for case studies, as they display relatively well-established collaborative housing activity, and account for the divide between centre (the capital Vienna) and periphery (the provinces, e.g. Salzburg) which characterises collaborative housing in Austria. On the organisational level, initiatives which were salient in the particular local context and accessible for research were selected.

The empirical study has been carried out in 2014 and 2015 with research methods involving a total number of 12 semi-structured, qualitative interviews with housing experts, initiators and members of selected collaborative housing initiatives (see Appendix for a list of expert interviews). The topic guides covered terminology, history, organisational and governance structure of the collaborative housing field and the selected case initiatives; the relevant multi-level policy context; and relationships to stakeholders in adjacent (international) housing fields. This was complemented by analysis of archival data and field observations of housing sites to increase the contextual and content related plausibility of our data. Qualitative content analysis of the material gathered was applied to identify the concrete configuration of the analytical elements outlined in the previous section (Strauss & Corbin, 2007).

## 4. Austria's housing policy context

In Austria, state intervention in the housing markets with the aim of correcting 'market failures' (Oxley, 2004) has a long standing tradition and is supported by policy-makers from different camps. In this regard, Austria strongly differs from other European countries where governments are reluctant to intervene directly in the housing market mechanisms and place emphasis on incentives for participants in the housing markets.

That apart, in Austrian housing policy, competencies are strongly split between the different state levels (central state, regions, and municipalities). Due to the division of responsibilities and the limited competencies of the central state government, Austria's housing policy-makers are not very good at dealing with nationwide housing issues, but better prepared to react to emerging local and regional housing problems. As in other federal constitutions, this results in some within-country variations in housing policies.

### 4.1 *The central state level*

While a particular legislative framework for collaborative housing is still missing, existing central state laws, e.g. the 'limited liability company law', determine the legal forms which can be taken by collaborative housing initiatives. Still other central state regulations are primarily focused on established housing providers and favour conventional housing types. Tenancy law, for example, sets rules mainly for the private rental housing sector, but does not explicitly consider the needs of collaborative housing initiatives. Ownership law, which regulates the individual ownership of dwellings in multi-storey blocks, is criticised as insufficiently considering collaborative principles. The 'Non-Profit Housing Act' is another relevant law containing numerous rules for non-profit housing providers, which in Austria deliver roughly 24 % of rental housing. These refer, among others, to the principle of 'cost-based' rent-setting, the activities of non-profit housing providers, the obligation to reinvest gains into housing construction and refurbishment, tenant involvement, the monitoring of the non-profit housing sector (by the state and the non-profit housing umbrella body *Verband gemeinnütziger Bauvereinigungen – gbv*). In this respect, collaborative housing initiatives may benefit from the well-developed non-profit housing sector by way of forming partnerships with established non-profit housing suppliers to realise single housing projects (Temel et al., 2009).

Recently, the central state government announced a revision of some of the above-mentioned housing laws, which may be beneficial to collaborative housing provision. In particular, regulations facilitating the provision of multi-generational housing and other new 'senior-friendly' housing forms were proposed. Political struggles within the central state coalition government have led to a delay of these reforms, and it is difficult to foresee whether they will be implemented during the present period of governance.

Finally, the provision of housing subsidies is not a major concern of central government, irrespective of its partisan composition. So far, no nation-wide housing subsidy scheme targeted at collaborative housing initiatives has been established.

### 4.2 *The regional level*

As a consequence of devolution in the late 1980s, the provinces are fully responsible for designing and running their own housing subsidy schemes, which are co-financed by contributions from the central state budget. The emphasis is on the provision of supply-side subsidies mainly in the form of public loans for housing construction and refurbishment, while demand-side assistance for low-income tenants plays a minor role, by contrast to mainstream policy development in Western Europe. According to estimates, no more than 23% of all housing subsidies are demand-side support, including

means-tested housing allowances or interest subsidies for low-income households (Lawson & Milligan, 2007).

The provincial authorities enjoy considerable freedom in allocating subsidies among housing providers for new projects and in determining the conditions that housing providers must fulfil to obtain subsidies. Conditions refer to e.g. standards of quality, maximum rent levels, tenure mix, and elderly-friendly design. Specified by housing promotion guidelines at the provincial level, conditions are somewhat varying within the country.

It has to be noted, however, that in all provinces different types of tenures and housing providers are eligible for supply-side subsidies. The access to housing programmes has been opened by stages to collaborative housing initiatives that are permitted to submit applications for producer subsidies. An apparent problem, however, is that the funding guidelines often do not explicitly consider the specific requirements of collaborative housing projects. In particular, shared facilities and additional construction costs due to the consultation of experts and participative planning are usually not covered by public subsidies. Instead, funding criteria tend to favour standardised types of dwellings, as constructed by large-scale non-profit housing providers, which pick up the lion's share of all supply-side subsidies. In some provinces, however, the so-called '*Heimförderung*' offers an adequate opportunity for collaborative housing initiatives to obtain subsidies for their housing projects. This particular funding model has always been popular among *Baugemeinschaften* in Vienna (Gruber, 2015; NE7).

Supply-side subsidies are linked to income ceilings to which applicants for subsidised housing are subject. In general, these income criteria are fairly generous, thus only excluding very well-off households. It is not permitted to raise rent levels, if the income surpasses these ceilings during tenancy. Consequently, subsidised housing, including that provided by collaborative housing initiatives, is accessible for a broad mix of income strata. It has considerable appeal for medium-income families and – by contrast to social housing in the United Kingdom – has not been transformed into an 'ambulance service' for the economically most vulnerable households (Ronald, 2014).

The provision of subsidies as an important type of public support rests on the political consensus that housing provision should not be left to the 'free market', but instead should be a key responsibility of public politics. Despite this relatively stable consensus, which is still shared by the major parties and by most interest groups, a current challenge that threatens Austria's established housing subsidy system arises from pressure on the public budgets.

To achieve compliance with the 'Stability and Growth Pact' of the European Monetary Union, the central state government cut back its contributions for the provincial housing programmes between the mid-1990s and 2010 at roughly €1,8 billion. As a consequence, provincial governments reduced the budget levels for their housing programmes. Since 2008, the provinces are allowed to divert central state funding to non-housing areas, such as public infrastructure or childcare facilities. This independence has reinforced within-country differentiation in housing subsidy policies. While some provinces, such as Salzburg, have recently reformed and partly curtailed their housing subsidy programmes, still others (e.g. Vienna) have maintained or increased the amount of subsidies. The shift to non-housing expenditures has dangerous implications as it curtails funding opportunities and increases the pressure on collaborative housing initiatives to tap alternative private sources of finance.

#### *4.3. The local level*

Housing providers, especially non-profit housing developers, benefit from discounted land prices, which can be labelled as a form of indirect subsidisation by municipal governments. A 'division of



labour' exists between the provinces, which provide producer subsidies, and the local, in particular municipal authorities that supply inexpensive building sites. The supply of suitable and cheap land by local governments is not only a strong facilitator of new housing provision, but also impinges upon the distribution of property rights. Moreover, the land price is a criterion for public funding, as new housing on too expensive sites is not eligible for producer subsidies. A particular municipal strategy is to purchase, re-develop and allocate brownfields to non-profit housing developers and collaborative housing initiatives, often via developer competitions to maximise public benefits. Given the scarcity of suitable and inexpensive sites in urban areas, land release by the municipalities appears to be crucial for the success of collaborative housing projects. In return for providing land, local authorities secure the right to nominate a share of first (and subsequent) lets. This practice, however, is problematic insofar as dwellings are allocated to tenants who do not belong to the collaborative housing initiative (Temel et al., 2009).

In addition, local, more precisely municipal councils in Austria have a strong say in spatial planning strategies, e.g. in defining a particular need for house types and social housing in their area (Wankiewicz, 2015). This local decision-making power can, to a certain extent, facilitate collaborative housing initiatives or exert a constraining effect, depending on the willingness of the local political elites.

To sum up, there is a paucity of special policy initiatives targeted at collaborative housing initiatives, while existing policies only partly take into account the requirements of the emerging collaborative housing sector. The limited responsiveness of the housing system may provide a partial explanation for why it is difficult to set up collaborative housing initiatives in Austria. Moreover, the Austrian welfare state is still relatively generous, because state retreat and the impact of neoliberal thought have been less pronounced than in other EU-countries. The overall volume of social expenditures has remained fairly constant, some welfare programmes being extended rather than hit by retrenchment. Medium-earners still benefit from an elaborate social insurance system, while lower-income households are eligible, e.g. for various transfer payments, including housing allowances and interest subsidies. In the context of a well-maintained welfare state, the pressure on households to set up collaborative housing projects appears to be lower as compared to more market-driven welfare and housing systems. In addition, values of collaboration and cooperation have been somewhat 'buried' by the traditional idea of paternalism, which foregrounds the role of the state in regulating the housing markets and in determining the housing standards.

In the following sections, we look at two case studies of collaborative housing activity within particular local housing contexts. The analysis is structured according to the dimensions earlier identified in the sections 'Theoretical framework' and 'Austria's housing policy context'. Thus, both case discussions start with an elaboration on the *institutional context dimension* with a particular focus on the policies of *housing subsidies and land supply*, as these represent a policy focus on the local level. This is followed by analysis of the *supply-side dimension*, on the level of concrete providers and projects, while the *demand-side dimension* is not the focus of this paper.

## **5. Case I: *Baugruppen* in Vienna**

### *5.1. Housing subsidies and land supply policy (institutional context dimension)*

In 2009, an Austrian-wide umbrella association, the *Initiative for Collaborative Building and Housing*, was founded as a platform for knowledge exchange and promotion of collaborative building activity. The umbrella has also been engaged in lobbying activities to mainstream collaborative housing ideas (NE2). Apparently, the local government of Vienna has taken up and integrated some of these ideas in its current housing policy. Together with the sector's own promotion activities, this has led to

increasing public attention for different forms of collaborative housing and particularly the *Baugruppen* model in the following ways (Hendrich, 2012):

First, on a discursive level, policy ‘lead’ themes, such as the ‘Smart City’ or ‘social sustainability’ have given legitimacy to ideas of resident participation and community building within the wider promotion of mainstream social housing by the Viennese local government over the last decade (Lang, 2013). Secondly, building on this discursive platform, the Social Democrat-Green Coalition government in Vienna has recently facilitated access to land and public funding for *Baugruppen* projects. For this purpose, some housing policy criteria, according to which land and building subsidies are distributed through developer competitions (*Bauträgerwettbewerbe*), have been amended to reflect the above mentioned ‘lead themes’. This is of course favourable for *Baugruppen* projects, as in tenders for new social housing construction, developers have to consider criteria of community building and tenant participation (Förster, 2002; Gutmann & Huber, 2014; Wohnfonds Wien, 2015). Key benefits of promoting ‘social sustainability’ in developer competitions are the institutionalisation of a culture of cooperation and knowledge transfer among different stakeholders in housing, the advancement of architectural innovations for communal facilities, and the integration of external professional consulting for community development (Förster, 2002; NE7).

### 5.2. *Housing projects and providers (supply-side dimension)*

Collaborative housing is not an entirely new phenomenon in Vienna. It can be traced back to the self-help activities of the cooperative settlers’ movement in the 1920s, which triggered important innovations, later mainstreamed in public housing in Vienna. In traditional cooperative housing estates, social and architectural innovations were combined to build ‘small villages’ with numerous communal facilities, not known in other housing sectors at that time (Novy & Förster, 1991). Furthermore, elements of cohousing and communal living were integral parts of some of the showcase projects of municipal housing in ‘Red Vienna’ during the interwar period (Förster, 2002).

However, in contrast to large-scale cooperatives, collaborative housing models – especially in the form of autonomous, self-organised projects – got little public promotion within Vienna’s social housing sector after 1945 (Lang & Novy, 2014). An exception was a wave of resident participation in social housing which took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Back then, a couple of pathbreaking projects were initiated and realised by a small group of architects, such as Ottokar Uhl and Franz Kuzmich. However, apart from a few showcase projects (e.g. the council housing project *Festgasse* in Vienna), the impact of this collaborative housing movement was limited and finally came to an end in the late 1980s. (NE1)

The starting point of the current wave of *Baugruppen* activity in Vienna can be set around the year 2000. Initiatives of several authors, architects and some resident groups led to a revival of participatory and community principles in housing, clearly influenced by the *Baugruppen* movement in Germany. Thus, the term *Baugruppe* has also been transferred from the German housing context to the Austrian discourse. (NE2) In this paper, we follow a more general definition of *Baugruppen* as housing projects that are (co-)initiated, (co-)planned and (co-)constructed by future residents. Additionally, they can aim at the creation of an intentional community (Temel et al., 2009).

On the level of concrete projects within this case study, we look at salient *Baugruppen* activity in the urban development area and neighbourhood Seestadt Aspern, one of the largest of its kind presently in Europe. Here, the city administration has for the first time made available building plots directly to such collaborative housing projects.<sup>2</sup> The acceptance of their bids in 2012 has initially resulted in the

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<sup>2</sup> It was actually the first land release to *Baugruppen* projects, i.e. a specific sub-field of collaborative housing. However, the city administration regularly conducts developer competitions for specific

development of five pilot projects<sup>3</sup>, each of them representing a slightly different approach towards participatory planning and construction as well as self-organisation (Hendrich, 2012).<sup>4</sup> In terms of size, the individual projects range from 17 to 59 units with all schemes but one already finalised by summer 2015 (Wohnfonds Wien, n.d.).

As far as the organisational models are concerned, truly self-managed *Baugruppen* have to be distinguished from partnership projects with larger developers and non-profit housing associations (NE2). For the latter projects, residents can rent their flats from the housing provider and this money, together with initial deposits, is used to pay off construction loans. In two of the projects, individual renters organise themselves as an independent organisation which gives them the opportunity to act as a general tenant with a future buy option for the entire building. In this way, the different financial contributions of tenants as well as their individual loans can be managed more efficiently. (Hendrich, 2012)

For *Baugruppen*, Vienna's current approach to housing developer competitions provides not only opportunities but also challenges,

- Some new collaborative housing development takes place in peripheral areas of the city, such as in the Seestadt Aspern. These locations are not particularly favoured by the core target groups of *Baugruppen* who would rather like to see a project developed in inner city locations.<sup>5</sup> However, given that land prices are too high in the city centre, it can be challenging for *Baugruppen* projects in peripheral locations to attract enough potential residents (Hendrich, 2012; NE2).
- The City of Vienna usually offers larger construction sites in developer competitions which clearly favours large-scale non-profit housing providers who can get quick access to financing and are able to plan complex housing projects within tight timescales. For the development of collaborative projects, it is often challenging to keep to strict cost plans which have to be agreed well in advance (NE3). Against this background, it would apparently be more difficult for resident groups, starting from scratch, to submit a competitive bid for a construction site. Moreover, access to direct subsidies is much easier for registered social housing providers in Vienna. However, small-scale *Baugruppen* would hardly ever seek to become registered providers, as one of the main requirements is constant building activity (NE4).

## 6. Case II: 'Inter-generational Living' in Salzburg

### 6.1. Housing subsidies and land supply policy (institutional context dimension)

Collaborative housing in the form of cohousing has emerged in Salzburg during the 1970s and 1980s. One of the pioneers and still leading architects in this field is Fritz Matzinger who has built his *Atriumhäuser*, or 'Les Palétuviers', first in the neighbouring province of Upper Austria and then also in the Greater Salzburg area (NE5). Whereas his initial projects received direct housing subsidies,

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themes which in recent years have also included collaborative housing themes, such as intergenerational housing. (<http://www.wohnfonds.wien.at/articles/nav/136>)

<sup>3</sup> The 2012 developer competition consisted of 15 housing projects in total in different locations across the city. Out of these 15 projects, 5 *Baugruppen* schemes were approved, all of them in the Seestadt Aspern. ([http://www.wohnfonds.wien.at/media/file/Publikationen/N\\_Inhaltsverzeichnis\\_BTW\\_Buch\\_2012.pdf](http://www.wohnfonds.wien.at/media/file/Publikationen/N_Inhaltsverzeichnis_BTW_Buch_2012.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> A sixth *Baugruppen* project has been added in the meantime (<http://aspern-baugruppen.at>).

<sup>5</sup> However, further collaborative housing, and also *Baugruppen* projects, have been developed and planned in new urban development areas – in total size, a larger area than Seestadt Aspern – which are closer to the city centre, such as at *Hauptbahnhof*, e.g. the project 'so.vie.so', and at *Nordbahnhof*, e.g. 'Wohnprojekt Wien'.

Matzinger himself highlights that, over the years, funding negotiations with public authorities have become increasingly difficult. As a consequence, later projects have mainly been realised as privately financed, ownership models (NE5).

Outside Vienna and the regional capitals, owner-occupied houses are the dominant form of housing in rural Austria. In the province of Salzburg, even 46% of all flats are owner-occupied. (Wankiewicz, 2015) This structural dominance of private ownership in regional housing markets is also reflected in the province's policy approach towards direct housing subsidies. The Conservative party (*ÖVP*), which has traditionally been strong in the provincial government of Salzburg, is making sure that new housing development has to contain a substantial share of owner-occupied houses or flats. In contrast, the city of Salzburg is a traditional stronghold of Social Democrats (*SPÖ*) who have a preference for subsidised rental flats in their housing policy approach (RZ1).

However, due to increasing flexibility on employment markets and changing lifestyles among younger people, the demand for social rented housing is actually growing (Wankiewicz, 2015). In the city of Salzburg, scarcity of new building becomes a problem given predictions of future population growth, not comparable to predictions for Vienna but still substantial for a smaller regional capital. In addition, younger people find it increasingly difficult to buy their own property as land and house prices in Salzburg have constantly been rising over the last years (RZ1).

Nevertheless, one policy 'lead' theme which has recently emerged on both the regional and the local housing policy level in Salzburg is collaborative housing for elderly (RZ2). Substantial demographic shifts are predicted by experts in the fields of social care and social housing which will lead to an increase in the percentage of older people, not only in Salzburg, but in the Austrian society as a whole in the decades ahead. This development will substantially challenge traditional forms of elder care, such as public retirement homes in regional centres which are still the mainstream social policy approach in most Austrian regional provinces and municipalities (NE6). Locally-based, collaborative housing for elderly is seen as an alternative solution which helps bringing health care costs down and keeping senior residents in their local communities (RZ2; NE6).

## 6.2 Housing projects and providers (supply-side dimension)

Embedded in this institutional context, the case project '*Rosa Zukunft*'<sup>6</sup> was realised in the neighbourhood of Taxham, in the city of Salzburg, between 2012 and 2014. It represents a pioneer scheme in the field of intergenerational collaborative housing (*Generationenwohnen*) in Austria, comprising of a total of 129 units with the goal of building community among residents by mixing different age groups. The target group in the senior resident segment are people over 60 who are still able to live independently but would like to have certain support structures. Various communal facilities should encourage resident interaction and bonding. (RZ3) A key actor within the project '*Rosa Zukunft*' is the *Wohnkoordinatorin* ('housing coordinator'), a person with a professional background in social work who lives in the estate. She identifies residents' needs and acts as a network node by bringing residents together but also encouraging them to self-organise. (RZ1) '*Rosa Zukunft*' also focuses on eco-friendly design and sustainable living. This includes so-called 'Smart Grids', i.e. 'intelligent electricity networks' that take into account the behaviour of users in order to increase efficiency and sustainability (RZ1; RZ3).

'*Rosa Zukunft*' incorporates different tenures and a mix of housing providers – non-profit as well as private developers. For younger people, including families, it offers privately owned flats and detached houses. Seniors can choose between private and social rented flats, including some flats with a buy option (RZ3). This tenure mix and especially the substantial provision of private ownership

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<sup>6</sup> See also [www.rosazukunft.at](http://www.rosazukunft.at)

housing also reflects the conditions for housing subsidies in Salzburg which are set by both the regional and the local policy level (RZ1).

A key driver behind ‘*Rosa Zukunft*’ has been the *Diakoniewerk*, one of the largest non-profit providers in the field of social care in Austria. *Diakoniewerk* has conceptualised the project and provides the social care services for residents in the scheme. Over the last few years, the responsible project manager at *Diakoniewerk* has focused on developing and promoting social innovations in the field of elder care to provide solutions to the demographic challenges ahead (RZ1; RZ2).

For the successful realisation of the project, the partnership between *Diakoniewerk*, the non-profit housing providers involved – in particular the housing cooperative ‘*die Salzburg*’ – and the spatial planning department of the city administration turned out to be crucial. All of these actors gave a long-term strategic commitment to this form of collaborative housing development in Salzburg with the aim to develop similar projects in the near future. For this purpose, the land-use plan of Salzburg has for instance been amended with long-term provisions dedicated to intergenerational housing (RZ1).

## **7. Discussion of results and conclusions**

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the institutional context influences collaborative housing development in Austria. In answering this research question, a housing systems approach was applied, enriched by an organisational field’s perspective. The multi-level conceptual framework introduced could be beneficial for international comparative research on collaborative housing. It enables a systematic, theory-informed empirical analysis of the interplay between organisational practices and different policy levels. The presented housing systems approach can unpack specific policy elements (e.g. land supply, subsidies or regulation), but also cultural norms and values relevant for the development of collaborative housing in a particular context. This is complemented by an organisational perspective which shows how individual and collective actors in the emerging field of collaborative housing respond to constraining and enabling institutional elements. Through comparing institutional factors and organisational practices in collaborative housing in different European countries, generalities and differences can be identified, and individual elements contextually verified. Thus, our results feed into on-going international comparative research on collaborative forms of housing (e.g. Moore & McKee, 2012; Tummers, 2015) and on the changing institutional landscapes of housing systems (e.g. Lawson, 2010). It also contributes to the literature on territorial models of collaborative housing providers which is still underdeveloped (e.g. Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012; Minora et al., 2013).

The analysis in this paper shows that overall there is a limited responsiveness of the Austrian housing system’s existing policies to the requirements of an emerging collaborative housing sector. Whereas, for example, in Germany or Switzerland, small cooperatives represent a suitable and popular legal form for collaborative initiatives, central and regional state regulation in Austria have strengthened the role of traditional large-scale cooperatives as dominant providers, thus also sustaining organisational isomorphism and paternalism in the non-profit sector. Therefore, a legislative revision in favour of smaller cooperatives, similar to Germany, appears to be long overdue (Novy, 1993; Gruber, 2015). Nevertheless, our case evidence suggests that given the current specificities of the institutional framework, it seems beneficial for collaborative initiatives, such as *Baugruppen*, to form partnerships with larger cooperative providers, as these organisations are better positioned to access public funding and to secure sites through regional housing programmes. Furthermore, they can bring in their expertise, as is the case for some *Baugruppen* in Vienna, and even initiate collaborative housing projects, as our case study of ‘*Rosa Zukunft*’ in Salzburg shows. Thus, despite the obvious differences between the two housing models, cooperatives are emerging as partners for collaborative initiatives also because some housing managers are committed to a revival of traditional cooperative principles

(NE7). The relevance of partnerships with large-scale, non-profit and cooperative providers to develop collaborative housing is highlighted in different European countries, such as Germany, Sweden, The Netherlands or England (Ache & Fedrowitz, 2012; Labit, 2015; Lang & Mullins, 2015). In line with these international studies, our empirical evidence suggests that the influence of partnerships on self-determination and self-organisation of residents in collaborative schemes needs further critical investigation.

Moreover, our study finds that local authorities play a key role for collaborative housing projects in facilitating direct access to affordable land in urban areas, e.g. through favourable strategic land-use planning or developer competitions. These findings complement existing mainstream literature which mainly highlights the role of national and regional institutions in explaining social housing development patterns in Austria. However, there are, of course, limitations in deriving general conclusions from the case of Austria, where the role of the municipalities is particularly strong. Nevertheless, our findings are in line with recent evidence from Germany where increasing interest and support of municipalities for collaborative housing projects is observed, e.g. for collaborative housing for elderly persons and intergenerational schemes. In this respect, current research suggests that the right mix of autonomy and communal living can improve senior residents' quality of life but might also reduce public costs for elder care (Labit, 2015). These considerations are reflected in our case study and point to the need for future analysis of the effects of collaborative housing on socio-spatial development in Austria, echoing recent efforts in the German context (Droste, 2015).

Similar to our Austrian case evidence, current support structures for *Baugemeinschaften* and other collaborative projects still vary considerably between localities across Germany with 'soft' communication measures still dominating (Ache and Fedrowitz, 2012; Droste, 2015). Such spatial differences found within countries underline the relevance of our multi-level research framework with a focus on the configuration of local institutional environments to develop a better understanding for success and failure of collaborative projects. In particular, we believe that our research approach has potential for application to any country characterised by federalism or strong devolution. Thus, to advance this strand of inquiry, further research that critically investigates local authorities' impact on collaborative housing sectors in other countries is encouraged.

On the organisational level of collaborative housing, our case evidence highlights the important role of 'socially skilled actors' who can perceive and also seize opportunities in constraining policy environments (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p. 17f). Our analysis has revealed that the architects Fritz Matzinger (Salzburg case) and Ottokar Uhl (Vienna case) can be seen as historical prototypes of such actors who managed to make first inroads into the paternalistic culture of Austrian social housing with their landmark collaborative projects in the 1970s and 1980s. An example of 'social skill' from the '*Rosa Zukunft*' case refers to the project manager of *Diakoniewerk* who managed to build a strategic coalition of different housing actors by appealing to common interests in new affordable homes for younger people and collaborative housing solutions for elderly. This empirical evidence suggests that micro-level action can induce a culture of cooperation for developing collaborative housing in the local and regional policy environment. A similar role in challenging the existing status has been played by representatives of the umbrella 'Initiative for Collaborative Building and Housing' who effectively influenced the local institutional framework in Vienna through knowledge transfer as well as lobbying and networking practices. This application of 'social skill' strengthened collaborative elements in local developer competitions and paved the way for *Baugruppen* projects to be developed in Seestadt Aspern. Again, further research would need to identify and compare patterns of 'socially skilled action' in collaborative housing across Europe.

Of course, this study has some limitations. While our case study focus is clearly on collaborative models in urban housing, much of the cohousing activity in Austria, for instance, is focused on rural areas and often takes place in the private ownership segment (Millonig, Deubner, Brugger, Kreyer, & Matosic, 2010; Wankiewicz, 2015). Furthermore, our case studies only cover and contrast two local contexts in Austria. Therefore, in the next stage of this research, we will continue the case analyses and broaden our research focus to include further local housing systems, such as Linz or Graz. In Linz, and presumably also in Graz, local governments seem to be more resistant to supporting collaborative housing than in Salzburg, as they stick to a traditional housing policy approach. Finally, we will also include other organisational models of collaborative activity, such as in the fields of self-help housing, cohousing, and participatory models within the non-profit housing sector.

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## **Appendix**

### **Expert interviews**

- NE1...National Expert 1, Architect, April 9, 2015.
- NE2...National Expert 2, Umbrella Body, December 1, 2014.
- NE3...National Expert 3, Project Initiator, April 9, 2015.
- NE4...National Expert 4, Umbrella Body, December 17, 2014.
- NE5...National Expert 5, Architect, April 9, 2015.
- NE6...National Expert 6, Consultant, October 29, 2014.
- NE7...National Expert 7, Consultant, April 10, 2015.

### **Case studies material**

- RZ1...Meeting Protocol Project Presentation '*Rosa Zukunft*', June 2, 2014
- RZ2...Interview Project Manager '*Rosa Zukunft*', April 7, 2014
- RZ3...Info Folder '*Rosa Zukunft*', retrieved from <http://www.rosazukunft.at/downloads/folder.pdf>