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“Imaginaries of future social housing are desperately needed as a direct response to the pressures of housing financialization, the erosion of welfare safety nets, and the growing demand for local, democratic control over vital resources, beyond the State.“

Raquel Rolnik,
Professor at the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade São Paul

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Community garden in Ocupação 9 de Julho, São Paolo. (Photo: Judith M. Lehner)

Highly dynamic political, social, technical, environmental, and political transitions are raising a number of challenges for urban development and, more specifically, the provision of housing. The current housing crisis is stimulating political interest as well as a broad public debate on related issues and practical solutions. For this reason, housing research is also attracting increased attention within the academic discourse – with a wide range of disciplines involved.

A complex research field, it includes the design of buildings, housing as a form of practice, and housing regimes and policies but, also, an ideological and epistemological component (Madden, 2023) – especially when it comes to social housing. This is why housing studies at the intersection of basic and applied research require ‘a widening of housing’s purview and a renewed and open-minded dialogue across scales and positions‘ (Powell & Simone, 2022: 838).

Contemporary housing research requires new methodological and conceptual approaches that will enable a renewed dialogue and reassessment of the field (Krejs & Lehner, 2025). As Kemeny observes, the formulation of housing issues is itself shaped by the social organisation of housing research (Kemeny, 1988). These issues arise within a complex constellation of regulatory frameworks (building and tenancy law, zoning classifications), institutions (housing providers, competitions, labour chambers, housing funds), programmes (subsidy schemes), practices (allocation systems, living arrangements, household structures), normative models (sustainability, social diversity), spatial typologies, and political notions (affordability, sustainability).

The multifaceted nature of the field calls for a collective and reflective engagement that actively involves practice. Housing can be conceptualised as a network of interdependencies between issues such as: affordability – understood not merely as access to shelter, but as the production of spatial and social quality; social justice; housing policy; neighbourhood development; land use; and environmental sustainability. Accordingly, in order to advance a holistic understanding of the dynamics that are shaping the housing sector today, transdisciplinary housing research must integrate social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions.

In view of these challenges and demands, the following questions arise: as housing researchers/designers, how do we approach the gap between research and practice and develop methodologies across disciplinary boundaries? What are the necessary forms of knowledge in design, policy, and everyday life that need to be considered in housing research? How do we engage in a global comparative approach across both the Global North and South that addresses the specificity of housing in order to advance the field?

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Any attempt to answer these questions as an individual researcher or using a mono-disciplinary approach is unlikely to be successful. Hence an international and interdisciplinary programme for doctoral candidates was initiated at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien, with the support of the EXCITE initiative[1]. During a pilot year, from October 2024 until September 2025, the programme offered eight doctoral candidates and advisers the opportunity to explore several ways to transfer knowledge and conduct critical discussions on the housing sector.

THE NEW SOCIAL HOUSING DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

In conceptualising a contemporary programme focused on learning and knowledge exchange with/amongst early-career researchers, we think it is important to reconsider modes of knowledge production and also address why certain forms of knowledge are regarded as evidence-based, whereas others remain marginalised or invisible (Porter, 2015). The transition towards communal, affordable and adaptable forms of living also requires an unlearning of conventional planning, design, building, and dwelling practices. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Donna & MacLean, 1996), unlearning is not conceived as forgetting or rejecting existing (housing) knowledge, but as a spatial and critical practice that questions hegemonic, commodified, and normative modes of space production. It entails the deliberate adoption of alternative models, thereby enabling the inclusion of underrepresented perspectives, voices, and strategies in housing research and practice. Therefore, transdisciplinary housing research is also a process of learning and integrating diverse forms of local, academic, and practice-based knowledge.

In this sense, the New Social Housing Programme for doctoral candidates consisted of various actors participating in, and supporting the programme structure: rooted in academia but extending towards housing practitioners, social organisations, and municipal authorities. The Research Center for New Social Housing functioned as an organisational body. The project organisers, Selim Banabak (Research Unit for Urban and Regional Research, TU Wien), Bernadette Krejs (Research Unit for Housing and Design, TU Wien) and Judith M. Lehner (Research Center for New Social Housing, future.lab, TU Wien), curated the programme and courses, organised on-site meetings in Vienna and São Paulo, facilitated public events, and co-edited this magazine together with doctoral candidates. Professors from various TU Wien research units and distinguished international institutions across the Global North and South worked as advisers in a team-supervision setting. This meant that students had the opportunity to experience mentoring and discussion as part of a peer culture, thereby meeting the demands of contemporary didactic approaches to doctoral training.

At the TU Wien's Faculty of Architecture and Planning, academic guidance was provided by Prof. Michael Obrist (Research Unit for Housing and Design), Prof. Franziska Sielker (Research Unit for Urban and Regional Research), and Assoc. Prof. Angelika Psenner (Research Unit for Urban Design). In addition, Prof. Dragana Damjanovic (from the Faculty of Law at the University of Vienna) contributed some expertise from a legal perspective and Prof. Simon Güntner (formerly TU Wien, Research Unit for Sociology, now HAW Hamburg) brought in a social science perspective.

"Bringing students from different disciplines all working on different aspects of housing together is extremely valuable and has supported to position the students own work in a broader picture."

Franziska Sielker, Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien

International partners, who are all leading figures in the field and members of the Sounding Board of the Research Center for New Social Housing, were invited in line with the programme's ambition to foster global scientific exchange. They included Prof. David Madden from the London School of Economics, Prof. Massimo Bricocoli from the Politecnico di Milano (Department of Architecture and Urban Studies), and Prof. Raquel Rolnik from the Universidade de São Paulo (Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism).

The doctoral candidates involved in the programme's pilot year represented a broad spectrum of disciplines, methodologies and global perspectives, each of which contributed to an expanding understanding of the sector as a social, legal, and spatial challenge. In her doctoral research, Bárbara Caetano Damasceno (University of São Paulo, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism) analyses public policies regarding housing production in the context of poverty and social vulnerability in São Paulo between 2000 and 2022; she reveals that state-led housing initiatives, despite large-scale outputs, often reproduce inequalities and fail to address socio-spatial exclusion. Charlotte Damböck (University of Vienna, Faculty of Law) investigates the legal framework for the transformation of the building stock in Vienna; she examines how public authorities can steer the decarbonisation of existing dwellings while maintaining affordability and adherence to the rule of law. Julia Dorner (TU Wien, Research Unit for Urban and Regional Research) examines the trade-offs between urban greening and social equity, focusing on if Vienna's housing regulations help mitigate green gentrification and sustain social balance in the course of the environmental transition. Silke Fischer (TU Wien, Research Unit for Building Construction and Design 2) addresses questions of scale and collectivity in housing, revisiting the notion of 'the great number' as both an architectural and social challenge in designing equitable, high-quality dwellings for large populations. Marcella Franco de Andrade (University of São Paulo, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism) develops a municipal housing improvement programme for low-income families in São João del-Rei (Brazil) by proposing a replicable model that combines a participatory process, a legal framework, and a practical renovation strategy to secure the right to adequate housing. Pratap Jayaram (London School of Economics, Department of Sociology) explores landlord and tenant attitudes towards the legal contestation of rights in New York City; he examines how both groups engage with, and reinterpret the state's role in

▲ David Madden speaking at TU Wien during the public talk 'New Social Housing? Rethinking Research and Global Perspectives.' (Photo: Bernadette Krejs)

1 The Excite Initiative of the TU Wien's Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning promotes outstanding projects in teaching and research, in particular those that connect teaching and research. It was launched in 2016 as an outcome of an open process, 'Parliament of the Questions', which discussed future issues and research ideas.

mediating property relations within a financialised housing system. Diego Martínez (TU Wien, Research Unit for Housing and Design) studies temporary occupations and adaptive reuse of large-scale buildings, with a focus on Rome, to understand how informal appropriations generate new forms of communal living and hybrid urban typologies. The PhD research of Marco Patruno (Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies) investigates the re-design of ground floors and facades in Milan's social housing estates through post-occupancy analysis; he proposes architectural strategies that enhance open hybrid spaces as active agents of social regeneration.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE, REFLEXIVITY AND CO-LEARNING: A REVIEW OF THE PILOT YEAR

The Doctoral Programme on New Social Housing was launched on 13 November 2024: a kick-off online meeting brought together the organisers, doctoral candidates, and academic advisers so that they could get to know each other and discuss the upcoming programme. This initial encounter provided a space for participants to introduce their research trajectories, state their expectations, and identify needs and interests, thereby enabling the organisers to calibrate the programme according to the stages and disciplinary backgrounds of the candidates.

Soon after, the first of three webinars for the organising team and PhD candidates took place under the label 'Towards Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Housing'. Featuring text discussions and input talks from international experts, the webinar facilitated the establishment of a collaborative 'give-and-take matrix' designed to map synergies and potential areas of cooperation among the participants. Didactically, this opening phase reflected a commitment to co-learning and the co-production of knowledge, thereby positioning doctoral training as an experimental space in which disciplinary boundaries are negotiated rather than prescribed. In February 2025, the group convened in Vienna for their first in-person meeting. The event combined academic exchange with field-based learning: doctoral candidates presented their research projects and received detailed feedback both from peers and advisers, while excursions to the emblematic social housing complexes of Karl-Marx-Hof and Alt-Erlaa provided tangible insights into Vienna's legacy. The meeting culminated in a public lecture by the three international advisers – David Madden, Massimo Bricocoli and Raquel Rolnik – under the title *'New Social Housing? Rethinking Research and Global Perspectives'*, followed by a number of considerations by Bernadette Krejs, Judith M. Lehner and Michael Obrist. The last part of the meeting in Vienna was a two-and-a-half-day writing retreat that encouraged collective reflection and academic production by doctoral candidates, with an input by Maja Kevdzija on academic writing strategies.

"The one-year experience of the Doctoral Programme on New Social Housing showcased how an interdisciplinary and collaborative focus, by incorporating lived and academic experiences from different parts of the world, serves to both deepen existing knowledge and broaden scholarly perspectives."

Raquel Rolnik, Professor at the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade Sao Paulo

A second webinar, held in April 2025, extended the methodological discussions initiated earlier in the programme. This session explored diverse approaches to housing research – ranging from ethnographic inquiry to econometric analysis. Contributions by Marietta Haffner (TU Delft) and Dara Turnbull (Housing Europe) provided comparative and policy-oriented insights, while Lisa Sigl (Responsible Research Practices, TU Wien) offered practical perspectives on the operational challenges inherent in transdisciplinary research settings. Thanks to this session, the programme reiterated its emphasis on methodological pluralism, inviting participants to reflect critically on how distinct epistemic traditions and approaches might be integrated in order to advance a more comprehensive understanding of the sector.

Then an international exchange took place in São Paulo in May 2025. This part of the programme allowed participants to engage with the architectural, social and political specificities of Brazilian housing practices and policies. Hosted by Raquel Rolnik and the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP), the workshops centred on the presentation and peer discussion of ongoing doctoral work, with a focus on methodological approaches and

Participants of the Doctoral Programm during the New Social Housing Summer School. (Photo: Judith M. Lehner)

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Group of doctoral candidates and colleagues at Alterlaa housing estate.
(Photo: Research Center for New Social Housing)

methods. Field visits to occupied buildings, housing initiatives, and social housing projects, which involved talks with technical teams and members of social organisations, revealed the interrelations between informal practices, public policy, and community-based initiatives, contrasting with the Viennese context explored earlier in the year. In terms of learning and knowledge transfer, the São Paulo meeting embodied the transnational and comparative dimension of the programme, demonstrating how contextual specificity and cross-cultural exchange might contribute to rethinking the field as a globally situated, yet locally grounded practice.

"Housing has been given new attention and will continue to receive more political attention. Politicians perceive housing as one of the key factors for people's dissatisfaction. As such, I believe that more funding is going to be freed up for housing: How it will be used, at least on the European Union side, remains to be seen."

Franziska Sielker, Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien

The final phase of the pilot year unfolded in June 2025 with a third, peer-organised webinar that served as a preparation for the Vienna International Summer School on New Social Housing. The latter event, organised in September 2025 by the Research Center for New Social Housing, marked the provisional conclusion of the doctoral programme. Gathering once again in Vienna, participants presented their research posters to an international audience of scholars and practitioners, thereby consolidating the transdisciplinary exchange that had developed throughout the year. This concluding phase not only showcased the progress made by the doctoral research projects during the programme year, but also illustrated how transdisciplinary collaboration can be cultivated as a sustained pedagogical practice – one that values reciprocity, reflexivity, and co-learning in academic research.

THE FUTURES OF...

Building on the experiences and reflections generated throughout the pilot year, we realised that how we produce knowledge on housing becomes inseparable from *what kinds of housing futures* such knowledge will enable. The dialogues, collaborations, and comparative encounters between Vienna and São Paulo – and all other sites included in the doctoral candidates' case studies – foregrounded the need for situated knowledge, that is to say, insights that emerge from specific contexts, practices, and lived realities rather than from universal models. In this sense, transdisciplinary housing research operates as a reflective practice, continually questioning its own assumptions, methods and positionalities. The multiplicity of voices included in the programme illustrates the value of epistemic plurality as a condition for reimagining housing beyond disciplinary, institutional and geographic boundaries. The focus of this magazine extends these concerns into a collective exploration of how housing futures are imagined, narrated, and materially enacted.

Imagining the future often brings to mind individuals living in smart homes within a smart city. We are well acquainted with techno-positive and masculine paternalistic representations of how to live together in the future, displayed through ideas like the 'Walking City' (1964) by Archigram or the drawings of 'The Continuous Monument' (1969) by Superstudio. In contrast, David Madden suggests in 'Social Housing Futurism' that we could rethink the future not only in technological terms but also in social ones (Madden, 2025). Hence we asked: is social housing aspiring to better living for all the most radical concept of the future? Andre Holm introduces housing as a 'social infrastructure' (Holm, 2024) financed by public investment, largely free, and intended for all population groups. That these ideas can be transferred to spatial practices was shown by June Jordan (together with R. Buckminster Fuller) in her speculative proposal: 'Skyrise for Harlem' (1964), where she wrote 'no one will move anywhere but up' (Saval, 2024: 57), advocating for environments that uplift residents' dignity and well-being.

This issue of the future.lab magazine proposes possible ways to describe, think and act a different future for social housing. The short essays unveil the prospects of dwellings for human communities, of policies for spatial justice, and of practices promoting urban democracy by reclaiming social housing as the urban future.

In his essay, 'Rethinking Social Housing: The Future Lies in Existing Urban Assets and Everyday Practices', Marco Patruno points out that future social housing is deeply connected to the role of residents as active agents of change. By adapting existing buildings through a participatory design process and valuing everyday practices and community engagement, housing can evolve into a resilient, inclusive space that reflects diverse needs and fosters social connection.

Silke Fischer describes the potential of 'Being many' by examining population growth and the resource scarcity debate, emphasising tensions between environmental sustainability and prosperity. She challenges minimal housing norms and advocates for 'luxury for all' as a political demand. The essay calls for environment-friendly, scalable solutions that prioritise well-being, equity, and innovative architecture.

Charlotte Damböck argues in her essay that the state plays an essential role in social housing provision because market-driven provision often lacks affordability. In her essay, 'The Future of Social Housing is the State's Responsibility', she highlights the state's roles in regulation, funding, and direct provision; she emphasises the need for legal frameworks and enforcement to support cooperative and public housing, and ensure that housing is treated as a social right and common good.

The essay 'From Social Control to Social Accountability: A Principle for Housing's Future' by Pratap Jayaram critiques the financialisation of housing, which reduces tenant autonomy and fosters insecurity. He calls for a shift to social accountability, whereby the state would provide housing while tenants share responsibility for their homes. Tenant organising can build up solidarity and empowerment, offering a model to steer housing systems towards equity and collective well-being.

In his essay, 'What is the Future of Social Housing? Squats as a Potential Element', Diego Martinez examines squats in Rome. Informal housing is introduced as a survival strategy amid inadequate state provision. Acting as socio-spatial labs, squats challenge market-driven models by fostering community and collective urban practices. Recognising and formalising these squats can enhance social housing policies and promote inclusive, participatory urban development.

'A Green Utopia for Social Housing?' by Julia Dorner points out that the future of social housing must prioritise accessible urban green spaces to enhance health and reduce inequality. While green areas improve well-being, they risk driving up rents and causing displacement. Combining green social housing with policies such as rent control can ensure equitable access, thus balancing environmental benefits with affordability and social inclusion.

Bárbara Caetano Damasceno's essay, 'Beyond a Commodity – Housing as a Social Right and Public Service', critically examines commodification in Brazil, highlighting how market-driven policies have undermined housing as a social right. It calls for a shift towards state-led, rights-based approaches that integrate housing into a broader social and urban policy framework to address inequality and exclusion.

In her essay, 'The Future of Social Housing: A Multidisciplinary, Innovative, and Sustainable Approach to the Renewal of Self-Built Homes in Brazil', Marcella Franco de Andrade points out that the future of social housing in Brazil demands a multidisciplinary, sustainable approach that addresses informal self-built homes. Inclusive policies integrating urban planning, technical support, and community participation could transform precarious settlements by promoting equity, resilience, and social integration amid structural exclusion.
Moving from methodological experimentation to speculative thought, the essays gathered here do not merely envision possible futures but also interrogate the sociopolitical, environmental and spatial imaginaries that underpin them. Enjoy reading fresh perspectives on the future of social housing that reflect critically on the visions and challenges that shape how we might live together!

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BERNADETTE KREJS
is a Senior Scientist based at TU Wien. Her work is situated in a transdisciplinary research field between architecture, housing and visual culture. Some of her publications are "Changing Spatial Practices", "Instagram-Wohnen", and "Vienna: The End of Housing (as a Typology)".

JUDITH M. LEHNER
is Head of the Research Center for New Social Housing at TU Wien, she studied architecture at TU Wien, ETSA Sevilla and the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and earned her doctorate from HafenCity University Hamburg. Her research explores the social dimensions of housing.

SELIM BANABAK
is a Postdoctoral Researcher at TU Wien with academic backgrounds in both Economics and Planning. His research focuses on regional and urban housing markets, and he has published several peer-reviewed papers in international scientific journals.

Rethinking Social Housing

The Future Lies in Existing Urban Assets and Everyday Practices

Article by
Marco Patruno

Contemporary ways of inhabiting urban space have undergone profound transformations. In recent decades, significant social changes, including population ageing, greater cultural diversity resulting from migration, and the increasing prevalence of single-person households, together with the diversification of family structures, have generated increasingly diverse housing needs. The insistence on outdated residential models, which in many cases have not been subject to critical review, risks reinforcing forms of spatial and social inadequacy.

While existing structures, which often accommodate a variety of household types, should not be erased, a critical reinterpretation of inherited models is nonetheless necessary in order to reflect the relationship between built space and the everyday practices of residents.

It is evident that the inhabitants themselves frequently assume the role of agents of transformative practices, modifying their dwellings to better meet their needs and thereby becoming, in effect, informal designers, namely non-professionals who adapt and reconfigure spaces without any formal architectural training. These grassroots interventions, carried out through a collective rather than individualistic logic (such as enclosing balconies to create additional rooms, or appropriating shared spaces, including horizontal and vertical circulation areas for private use), highlight the inadequacy of current regulatory frameworks, which are often predetermined in form and therefore rigid. Thus, the regulations that govern public housing need re-evaluating; also, jurisdictions differ between countries and, in general, there are no rules that formally legitimise informal interventions by residents. In some cases, such as in Italy, minor modifications may be permitted but often require specific municipal approval, as well as the consent of, and participation in residents meetings, thereby emphasising the participatory role of tenants and their engagement with the spaces they inhabit. This highlights the need for contextually informed approaches to regulatory reform that facilitate gradual, resident-managed transformation. Within the context of residential domains, public housing estates represent a vast and dynamic archive of inhabitation practices.

The buildings, subject to generational turnover, embody transformations that offer valuable insights for rethinking housing models. Far from being peripheral, these places function as active laboratories for understanding the interaction between architecture and social dynamics over time; making these sites visible they can be understood through detailed site observation and comparative redrawing of spaces. Researchers and urban planners can study the settings using these methods to identify patterns of use, informal interventions, and evolving social practices.

For residents, this process provides a means to understand the spaces they inhabit and recognise their capacity to actively contribute to their improvement. This raises a critical question regarding the efficacy of current regeneration programmes: do they deliver sustained enhancements in urban quality and social cohesion, or are they limited to isolated interventions, often detached from the broader context? Furthermore, are public heritage conservation interventions implemented in alignment with intended procedures and timelines, and are they responsive to the needs of local communities? Evidence from existing public estates suggests that integrating resident participation, adopting flexible regulatory frameworks, and systematically observing everyday practices can support more coherent and context-sensitive regeneration strategies while enhancing architectural quality and strengthening social cohesion, thereby mitigating exclusionary dynamics. Building on these insights, an analysis of such long-term processes allows for the formulation of general principles that are useful not only for the rehabilitation of existing assets but, also, for the development of new interventions grounded in flexible models.

In other words, in order to address the decline of public residential housing, a structural urban strategy is required, rather than mere technical upgrades. In many cases, the phenomenon of architectural and social decay can be attributed to institutional neglect, the rigidity of previously designed typologies, and their poor adaptability.

To avoid fragmented or purely aesthetic interventions, revitalisation efforts must adopt a systemic vision that considers the neighbourhood as a complex organism, historically layered, socially active, and spatially adaptable. The built environment encapsulates sedimented knowledge: traces of daily life constitute a reservoir of insights capable of inspiring housing solutions that can evolve over time.Urban theorists such as Henri Lefebvre (1991) have emphasised that the city is a space shaped by the everyday appropriations and practices of its inhabitants, thus rendering urban space a social product whose vitality derives from internal relationships. In a similar vein, scholars such as John Habraken (2010) and Richard Sennett (2018) have pointed out the importance of designing urban environments that are adaptable and participatory. Their theoretical contributions underscore the urgency of integrating historical practices with contemporary needs.

In this regard, it is essential that public housing should be perceived as a commitment and responsibility shared between institutions and the community. This would involve a shift away from the logic of isolated interventions that do not enter into dialogue with each other but, instead, focus attention on the issue for a short time. This would also entail recognising existing public housing as a community asset rather than a mere emergency response, thus requiring the development of integrated strategies based on technical expertise and co-design processes. Specifically, more flexible regulations with a focus on controlled self-building and widespread retrofitting have the potential to expedite the process of implementation and enhance alignment with current housing requirements.

This, in turn, can contribute to the development of more inclusive and economically sustainable urban strategies. Consequently, the strategic allocation of resources and focus on the existing built environment may emerge as a viable approach, aiding in the prevention of architectural decline in previously designed spaces. It is only by treating the built heritage as a living system and a source of operative knowledge that truly innovative and sustainable housing policies can be formulated. Rethinking the existing thus means not only valuing collective memory but, also, laying the groundwork for a future mode of dwelling based on participation, adaptability, and care for architectural space.

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MARCO PATRUNO
is a PhD student in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano. His research focuses on public housing, analysed through case studies of the built heritage. He researches socio-spatial equity and urban transformation.

Being Many

Article by
Silke Fischer

We humans exist in large numbers – and with us our needs, our desires, our waste. The world population is peaking at a high level in this century, with the UN forecasting a maximum global population of around 10.3 billion people (UN DESA, 2024). This is the upper end of the exponential growth curve, which has always been the justification for a policy of scarcity ever since it picked up speed around 1800. The boat is full is the accompanying Malthusian narrative of modern mass society, which stubbornly clings to the idea of superfluousness and divides people into at least two classes.

Today, the question about resources is being asked in light of noticeable climatic changes. Environmental concerns and the resulting arguments on a global or even planetary scale are currently strong motifs in the architectural discourse. Werner Sobek uses concrete figures on theoretical global building material requirements to demonstrate global inequality in living standards; he makes obvious not only the impossibility of a global building standard based on the Western model but, also, emphasises the presumptuousness of wealthier countries in equipping themselves in this way (Sobek, 2023). The difficulty of the relationship between prosperity and ecology is made clear in Harald Welzer's analysis, in which he superimposes the Human Development Index (HDI) on the ecological footprint in global hectares (gha) and shows that there is currently no country that combines sustainable practices with a high standard of living and security (Giesecke et al., 2016). The Western world – and Sobek and Welzer are academic representatives of this world – is engaging in a kind of critical self-reflection and criticism of affluent consumption; architecture, as an explicitly material discipline, is part of this.

The environmental concern triggers calls for renunciation and efficiency. Both seem instantly appropriate in societies of abundance. But renunciation of what? Efficiency in what? Besides, renunciation is actually something you have to be able to afford in the first place.

What is enough, what is too little or too much, and what exactly is involved: these are questions that become acute in the context of social housing.

Housing for the many is and has always been under pressure; it is the prime example in architecture of the distribution of limited collective resources among many and it means budgeting under a cost cap.

Referring to Giancarlo de Carlo, Gabu Heindl points out the importance of criticising the idea that living should be based on the notion of 'bare minimum'. The minimum dwelling is a concept that dates back to the early days of mass housing as a historical response to scarce resources in mass society. The enthusiasm of architects for designing the minimum dwelling, and thus organising even the smallest space in the best possible way, replaced the why question with the how question, thereby instrumentalising architecture for the purposes of capital optimisation and the consolidation and reproduction of social power relations (Heindl, 2022: 188).

The claim luxury for all stands in opposition to this. It encompasses both the call for redistribution and equality and, at the same time, the idea that it is possible to live a life that is not just scraping by, but is characterised by generosity. Luxury is generally defined as that which goes beyond what is necessary or actually required, whereby it also involves a transgression of what is socially acceptable as normal. T. W. Adorno counters this by proposing a clear distinction between luxury and the phenomena of ostentation and prestige; he defines luxury as emancipation from the realm of ends (Wiesing, 2015). Understood in this way, the term can become productive.

In a world where scarcity is socially and politically organised, luxury for all is above all a political demand.

So is the current discourse on housing: more political than architectural in nature, it prioritises issues of financing, agency, and accessibility to housing. For some, this shifts the field of action of architecture.

However, architecture is also concrete in terms of the designation of areas and space, light, temperature zones, water taps, and shower heads. Regardless of whether the architectural task of future housing will lie in the redistribution of the existing or in the addition of new structures, the question of how much of what will always arise: how many toilets, how many square metres, how many (French) windows, how much insulation, how many linear metres of which material, how many tennis courts … per person? The sharing economy is helping to influence these figures. Being many is an opportunity, not a problem. But it remains unclear how radically all these questions should be answered.

Architecture develops programmatically and aesthetically in line with socially defined priorities. Perhaps the environmental perspective is (this time) wide-ranging enough that it can grow into a substantial leitmotif, thereby placing contact with nature, well-being, and pleasure at the forefront of the architecture of housing. An environmentally conscious programme could lead to innovative typologies, spaces, and aesthetics. In his essay Housing Revolutions, Ludgar Schwarte offers an even more visionary approach to thinking the future, saying that we must overcome habitation and derive our forms of living from freer ways of being in space (Schwarte, 2021: 23). The possibilities of housing and the potential of architecture have not yet been exhausted.

Ecology refers to a large scale of thinking and acting. Questions of housing and definitions of prosperity – to return to the large numbers – must be discussed and measured on this scale and examined for their scalability.

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SILKE FISCHER
studied architecture at Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany and at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles, CA. She is a licensed architect and a teacher at the Institute of Architecture and Design at TU Wien. Her dissertation at TU Wien situates housing within debates on material distributive justice.

The Future of Social Housing is the State's Responsibility

Article by
Charlotte Damböck

To think about the future of social housing is to think about the ways in which that future can be implemented and, in this essay, I will argue that it is the state that can promote the social dimension of housing. On a basic level, housing can be provided either by the state or by private actors. If private actors are profit-oriented, the social dimension is easily lost, as rising rents in unregulated housing markets, as well as financialisation and the global housing crisis, have shown (Rolnik, 2019). The free market will, in fact, not provide affordable housing for everyone. However, private actors also include people who own the houses they live in, people who turn abandoned buildings into places to live in, or groups of people building houses together and aiming for a more collective way of life. The institutionalised form used by the latter are housing cooperatives, although these are sometimes limited to shared ownership without community living. While these forms of privately organised housing and community living are undoubtedly social, they are not scalable without correspondent measures by the state: without a legal framework and appropriate funding, they are either dependent on participants with a lot of resources or lead to inadequate housing conditions in the long run.

As a result, it is up to the state to provide (in a broad sense) housing with a social dimension. There are several ways to fulfil this responsibility: the human right to housing is commonly mentioned and can be found in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), for example. Although the ICESCR and other documents are legally binding, they do not provide a justiciable right to housing. Since these texts are mostly contracts under international law, they first and foremost obligate the state and have very weak enforcement mechanisms. Without any means of enforcement, the right to housing is no right at all but, rather, a state objective (Frenz, 2024).

Secondly, the state can engage in regulation. This comprises rent legislation (e.g. protection from arbitrary termination of contracts, rent control, or tenants' right to participate in decisions), a land policy that favours affordable housing, and policy measures designed to enable and support the aforementioned self-organised social housing practices. It also entails creating the framework required for housing cooperatives. That the state can (and should!) regulate the rental and real estate market is a point worth stressing. A market that is meant to fulfil a basic need requires to be shaped in depth by the notion of the common good and, therefore, by the state.

Thirdly, there is the 'soft' instrument of funding. State funding can take the shape of subsidies or tax cuts; it is by and large a popular but not very effective measure to guarantee social housing if it is not linked to regulatory measures such as rent control or (partial) public allocation of the housing stock (Aalbers, 2016). For self-organised projects, however, funding often plays a vital role.

The most compelling way to bring about mass housing with a social dimension is actual provision by the state because it ensures long-term decommodification and affordable rents that may not even be cost-oriented (Holm, 2024). Simultaneously, building and managing the public social housing stock requires a fair amount of resources within municipal or other public entities: personnel, land and funding. As austerity politics have gained momentum for some time, the option of private-public partnerships has become increasingly attractive. From the state's point of view, contracts between the state and private actors to facilitate inexpensive housing (also called 'urban development contracts') promise increasing affordability and more say in urban planning while not having to fund it. However, experiences in Vienna have shown that private developers tend to try and circumvent their obligations.[1] For instance, affordable apartments are built on another site or the implemented social infrastructure is segregated rather than incorporated into living spaces, to name but a few. Additionally, contractual obligations tend to expire after a set period of time; as a result, the objective of permanent decommodification of the housing stock cannot be achieved. Even though private-public partnerships do promise a more efficient use of public resources, the enforcement of contractual obligations still demands some resources (Sedef, 2023). Urban development contracts necessitate strong implementation mechanisms in order to be able to contribute to the public provision of (social) housing.

To protect the social dimension of housing in the future, the state will have to facilitate and provide the right framework as well as intervene in the market. This active role of the state not only means providing its own housing and social infrastructure but, also, putting in place a strong regulation of the private sector. On the one hand, private cooperatives and movements need an appropriate framework in order to be able to build and maintain their own versions of social housing; on the other hand, for-profit opportunities for private actors have to be limited. There are many places and contexts where the state's role in housing has been heavily debated, geographically[2] and ideologically, both from the point of view of market liberalism[3] and of an anti-authoritarian (leftist) discourse[4]. Nonetheless, it is the best (and maybe only) entity fully equipped to ensure that housing retains its social dimension because it is the most suitable entity when it comes to working towards the common good.

1 See for example the Triiiple Towers or Danube Flats: https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000222169/im-wohnturm-danubeflats-bleiben-die-kaeufer-unter-sich (article in German).

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CHARLOTTE DAMBÖCK
is a university assistant (praedoc) at the Institute for Constitutional and Administrative Law at the University of Vienna. Her research focuses on the use of private law contracts as a cooperative administrative instrument.

From Social Control to Social Accountability: A Principle for Housing's Future

Article by
Pratap Jayaram

Critical housing scholarship consistently juxtaposes housing's function as a human necessity and its function as a commodity. On the one hand, the home is a spatial and psychological anchoring point; on the other, it is a tool for accumulation and speculation. The political privileging of the latter function in the capitalist formation, exemplified by the US housing system, has led to a nearly universal experience of precarity for renters, transforming a site of autonomy into one of uncertainty.

Far from being a side effect, the elimination of autonomy from the experience of housing is central to the project of financialisation. Empowered by new technology and data platforms, landlords break each tenant down into a set of financial and sociodemographic metrics, evaluating them on their ability to serve as consistent, low-maintenance sources of rent (Fields, 2022). They invite surveillance tools tested on city streets into private hallways and even the home itself, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion. Problem tenants—those who are behind on rent, 'overuse' building amenities, or have histories of insecurity—are either barred from renting in the first place, or evicted under state authority. All of this serves to isolate tenants at a financial and social level, depriving them of a sense of security or belonging. The state provides them little relief, having not only abandoned its role as a housing provider, but also incentivised speculation through neoliberal policies.

If housing financialisation is supported by a system of social control, then a housing future that reasserts housing's 'use value' must embrace the opposite principle: social accountability. I propose social accountability as an inversion of the capitalist housing system's fixation on top-down, private-market solutions and its pattern of pacification and moralisation. Social accountability accepts that the state is responsible for the provision of housing *for all* and, crucially, that tenants must be accountable to each other in the production of the home. The former requires a massive social and political upheaval, but I believe the path towards this is revealed by the promise of the latter, which can be found in the work of organised tenants.

While the primary goal of tenant campaigns is to wrest control over their homes from landlords, the outcomes they produce also renew individual and communal dignity. When tenants connect over their challenges, they reject their landlord's attempts to individualise and dismiss their problems. Tenant meetings frequently provide opportunities to reclaim securitised spaces such as lounges, gardens, or hallways. They create possibilities for mutual support—conducting repairs, helping with childcare or housework, or enriching common spaces. This re-establishes connections between tenants' shared labour, their well-being, and the quality of their environment. These actions intertwine resistance to landlord control with the material enrichment of tenants' lives through solidarity rather than paternalism.

If social accountability is the basis for tenants' resistance to housing injustice at the level of a building, the movement for social housing must now uncover how to scale this strategy up to the level of the entire housing system. We must go beyond understanding the patterns of insecurity produced through the present alliance of state and private housing actors, and target the very mechanics of their collaboration.

This includes scrutinising the connections between the state, financial institutions, and property owners, along with the operating logics of each group.

As a product of neoliberalism, the political acceptability of universal tenant insecurity is likely sustained by contradictions in motivation and behaviour. Should they be unearthed, these contradictions can serve as weak links in the rhetorical chain that justifies the state's continued divestment from social housing.

In addition, we must continue to explore the ways in which communities of tenants, both public and private, as well as the unhoused, create new patterns of living together in rejection of capitalist logics. When groups of tenants choose solidarity over isolation, they contend with the overlapping marginalisations that are imposed upon them and often pit them against each other. Their shared struggle requires them to navigate pivotal moments of friction over ideas about identity, class, property, and the role of the state (Yue & Li, 2023). Understanding these negotiations, and the novel social forms they produce, is pivotal to defining a future for social housing that fosters mutuality. Together, these two streams of inquiry can paint a picture of a housing future that embraces tenant autonomy, building stronger human connections in the process.

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PRATAP JAYARAM

iis a 2nd year MPhil/PhD in Sociology at the London School of Economics. His research focuses on the role of debt in rental housing investment and management in New York City, as well as the tactics used by organized tenants to resist housing financialisation. His work is influenced by his exposure to abolitionist and anti-eviction organizing in the US.

A Collective Journal
reflections on social housing

The more we look into social housing the more we can say: there is not much we can say about the concept that is true globally.
We live in different parts of the world, are socialized differently, and have diverse educational and professional backgrounds. What brought us together this year is our shared research interest in housing—housing as a matter of law, sociology, urban planning, architecture, politics, economy, philosophy and activism.
The question of how we can think about and work on this common interest on a global level was less the beginning than the end of the shared experience. The journey sharpened our awareness of the importance of language and fostered our appreciation of the expertise of others. Excursions to Vienna and São Paulo opened our eyes to systemic political and social differences. By participating in the Vienna International Summer School on New Social Housing in September, we became part of an even more global community.
Being part of a diverse group means getting out of your comfort zone, readjusting your language, rethinking your position and reconsidering the questions you have to the world.

We see this page as a way of tracing and reflecting these experiences, memories and conversations. A mapping exercise that became a journal of reflections.

We are:
Barbara Caetano Damasceno, doctoral candidate at FAU-USP (University of São Paulo);
Charlotte Damböck, doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna;
Julia Dorner, doctoral candidate at TU Wien;
Silke Fischer, doctoral candidate at TU Wien;
Marcella Franco de Andrade, doctoral candidate at USP (University of São Paulo);
Pratap Jayaram, doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics;
Diego Martínez, doctoral candidate at TU Wien;
Marco Patruno, doctoral candidate at Politecnico di Milano.

global discussion

Describing and analysing a topic requires the use of a precise and thoughtful language.
The ability to employ accurate narration, selecting the most appropriate terms to define a specific situation, event, or condition, allows the discourse to remain objective and focused on the issue itself, avoiding unintended interpretations.
The careful use of terminology, and the attention to linguistic nuances, contribute to building an academic discourse that is both broad and specific.
Through language, phenomena become recognizable and comparable across different contexts, enabling a clearer and more constructive global discussion.

language & translation

For non-native speakers, using English often means losing the accuracy and precision needed to articulate thoughts that have often been vague, fragile and unspoken until now. Translation can sometimes involve loss.

I remember Be ment about ho an academic d ways wants the imacy of a fiel Seeing the pre architecture stu help but feel im projects were s ical space, wi sometimes fe immaterial. I th our first meeti I realized how is in exchangi fields.

In academic discussions among doctoral students and researchers openness fosters an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives. This freedom to contribute, debate, and test ideas promotes continuous learning and connects new insights with existing research.

Speaking up first forces you to explain your thoughts across disciplines.

Cultural diversity in social housing estates is both an opportunity and a challenge—it requires an understanding of community not only in terms of its harmony, but also in terms of its friction. Romanticizing a place brings out its poetry, but it can also obscure the underlying mechanisms, the social and architectural realities that actually make it function.

Romantic vision, Class differences and Cultural differences

1st in person meeting in Vienna

2nd meeting in São Paulo

Carolina M
Constructi
PEARIBU
Photo Dieg

Wohnpark Alterlaa.
Photo Barbara Damasceno

De-romanticising social housing

Science for knowledge vs. Science for impact

Whilst working in an interdisciplinary group, different scientific cultures can clash. In some situations this was very noticeable: For example, we had to spend a significant amount of time on understanding questions that have been posed since there was a disconnect to what the others understood. In most situations the different understandings of what science is and should be just posed the background to our interactions throughout the year.

The Brazilian perspective

Efficiency of the state and the history of Vienna: a set of ongoing housing policies that combine planning and public investment with community participation.

History of social housing in Vienna.
Poster for the Lecture by Judith Lehner at USP in São Paulo.

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Here: SE

Differences in methods: Architecture, Economics, Social Sciences

São Paulo Lunch

1st Webinar

Group photo at Wohnpark Alterlaa.
Photo Barbara Damasceno

Karl Marx Hof, February 2025.
Photo Barbara Damasceno

When life in ers at would beach, arises. tectur least islands public garde ho is a

Cozinha Ocu
Photo Silke F

November 2024 — January 2025 — February 2025 — May 2025

cultural differences
x
global, innovative & sustainable solutions

…er Bernadette's com-…ut how architecture as …nic discipline in some …ts the empirical legit-…a field like sociology. …e presentations of the …re students, I couldn't …el impressed that their …ere so rooted in phys-…e, whereas sociology …s feels frustratingly …l. I think it was during …meeting in Vienna that …how much value there …hanging between the

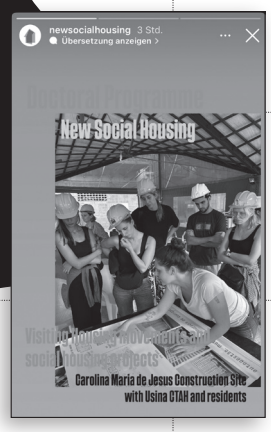
right to basic housing
≠
right to comfort

Social housing uses a formal language that reflects its essence and connects with its surroundings. Its architecture fosters interaction, sharing, and belonging, creating a home-place where personal and collective memories strengthen residents' self-determination.

Social housing: appearance and belonging

…ina Maria de Jesus …truction Site …IBU TCA + Usina CTAH. … Diego Martínez

Carolina Maria de Jesus Construcion Site - PEARIBU TCA + Usina CTAH.
Photo Silke Fischer



Milano + New York

Exploring perspectives on social housing in Milan and New York could be a first step to enriching ongoing research. Extending the approaches developed in the doctoral programme to these contexts may provide valuable insights and strengthen comparative analyses, even without direct fieldwork.

UBIQUITY
ABSENCE of RACE

This for me is also part of the process of understanding the history and context around housing in different parts of the world than the US. In the US, I don't think you can get very far talking about housing without talking about race, because property and race-making have been intertwined since the first colonization of the Americas. However, race is not necessarily constructed in the same way in other parts of the world, be that Vienna or São Paulo, and the way it relates to the struggle for just housing is also varied.

Top-down (Vienna) vs. Bottom-up (São Paulo)

Group photo at the Summer School in Vienna

Ownership society vs. Renter society
Changing perspectives on who provides social housing

How you view social housing depends on how you view the state. As we were visiting housing movements in São Paulo, some were shocked that the outcome of occupying an abandoned building would be individual ownership rather than social, publicly owned housing. From a Viennese point of view, the state means well and is supposed to provide the right framework for housing in a very broad sense. This also means you can have a sense of ownership without actually holding the property rights. However, more neoliberal governments have very little interest in actively supporting social housing, leading to a negative societal perspective towards it. Despite some of us having romanticized housing movements as universally fighting for socialized housing, we came to understand that squatters' primary concern was formalizing their tenure and improving their living conditions in whatever way possible.

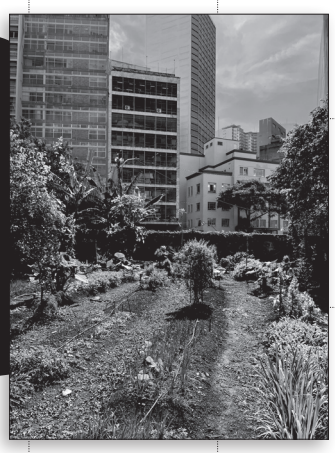
De-romanticising squatting

Confronted with squatting projects in São Paulo, the own position as an outsider becomes apparent. With an Eurocentric view, we romanticize squats as resistance—a fight for the right to the city, housing, and access to infrastructure. Yet daily survival depends on seemingly smaller issues: electricity, private space, and safety. In São Paulo, squats range from illegal occupations to negotiations for new housing, showing a path to formalization—if residents can stay and participate. The struggle continues across generations. We should see these projects not as ideals, but as other valid realities.

…infrastructure and architecture of SESC …n archipelago, these buildings are islands …elaxation, enjoyment and public service. …e: SESC 24 de Maio. Photo Silke Fischer

…When asked how they would describe …fe in São Paulo, two fellow research-…rs at FAU replied: exhausting. They …ould like to move, preferably to the …each, as soon as the opportunity …rises. The infrastructure and archi-…ecture of SESC fulfils this longing at …east a little; they are archipelagos, …slands of relaxation, enjoyment and …ublic service. Also the community …arden of Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Jul-…o is an oasis in the city.

… Ocupação 9 de Julho …ilke Fischer

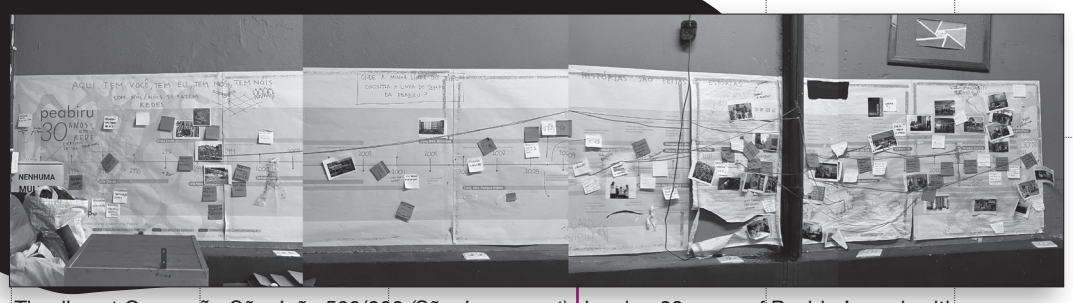


Community garden of Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho
Photo Silke Fischer

Blindspots - What are problems in Vienna?

Throughout the year, we held several workshops to examine Vienna's efficient system for providing housing. However, despite its many advantages, the construction of public housing is also declining in Vienna. Large-scale projects and production of micro as well as well as investment apartments, in particular, suggest that the outlook for new construction is not entirely positive. In terms of accessibility, many people in need of support fall through the system and have limited access to affordable housing. Furthermore, the authorities and institutions responsible for subsidies and assistance in finding housing form a confusing network that many in need find difficult to navigate, thus creating significant barriers.

Homelessness in Vienna



Timeline at Ocupação *São João 588/288 (São Joao squat)* showing 30 years of Peabiru's work with communities and housing movements in São Paulo. Photo Diego Martínez

New Social Housing Summer School in Vienna – HEALTH

September 2025

What is the Future of Social Housing? Squats as a potential element

Article by
Diego Martínez

HOW DO SQUATTING PROJECTS FIT INTO THE BROADER VISION OF SOCIAL HOUSING?

By examining cases in Rome, where up to 10,000 people live in illegal housing, we discover that the global housing crisis manifests itself through the informal conversion of buildings that were never intended for residential use.

The reality of the squatting practice in cities such as Rome is shaped by issues of survival and necessity (Vasudevan, 2015). The material conditions in which inhabitants live are characterised by a lack of legal and material security. According to UN-Habitat, adequate housing requires security of tenure, access to basic services and legal stability. Most squats do not meet formal housing standards and often emerge as a last-resort response to insufficient state provision.

As regards housing provision, squatting contrasts with a model of social housing where the state or local government creates, maintains, and subsidises affordable homes for people with limited means or no access to the private market.

SQUATS AND THE CITY — SOCIO-SPATIAL LABORATORIES

Despite their precariousness, squats function as a hybrid socio-spatial model that challenges conventional urban life. They act as laboratories for collective, creative solutions and demonstrate alternative forms of urbanism (Vasudevan, 2015). Imagined as pathways towards formalisation, squats can inform policy innovation in sustainable housing production through adaptive reuse of vacant spaces.

Two case studies in central Rome demonstrate this potential by presenting squats as a socio-spatial typology and a political, organisational and economic model that contrasts with conventional housing in a profit-driven market and the absence of public policy.

Porto Fluviale is a former military facility in the central Ostiense district that was occupied in 2003 and transformed into housing and communal spaces around a courtyard. Researchers from University Roma Tre collaborated with neighbourhood groups, activists, and the city council in a participatory redevelopment process. An ongoing legalisation process will secure accommodation for fifty-four families while preserving cultural spaces, workshops, and a market (Engel, 2021; Valeri, 2024).

Santa Croce / Spin Time Labs is a ten-storey former office building that was occupied in 2013. The upper floors were converted into apartments while the lower floors became social and cultural spaces, including an auditorium, workshops and a self-run canteen, thus connecting the building to the neighbourhood and urban fabric.

The creation of non-state public and common spaces acts as a boundary between individual living units and the urban fabric. These spaces strengthen social ties and offer resources such as workshops, markets, and cultural programmes (Stavrides, 2023). These spaces also provide a practical layer of protection against eviction, especially at Spin Time Labs, where eviction is a constant threat. Rather than romanticising squats, policies should guarantee social housing while supporting non-state solutions for urban commons (Grazioli, 2021). These projects demonstrate that housing encompasses participation, solidarity, and the right to shape and reshape our cities.

I.U.R. (Informa Urbis Romae) Guide psycogeorgaphique Psychogeographical Mapping of occupied spaces in Rome. (Authors: Chiara Davoli & Leroy S.P.Q.R ´DAM, last updated June 2022)

MAKING HOME — SPACES OF EMANCIPATION

In both case studies, the inhabitants have modified and managed their spaces incrementally, performing repairs, subdivisions, and redesigns without any professional intervention. Recalling Bernard Rudofsky's architecture without architects, in which he highlights the value and ingenuity of vernacular architecture (Rudofsky, 1977), the makeshift solutions inside the squats produce a contemporary vernacular in building transformation.

In Porto Fluviale, these adaptations inform the participatory design of the ongoing legalisation process.

POLITICS AND POLICY — SPACES OF RESISTANCE

As the case of Spin Time Labs shows, the squatters rely on strategies for organising and dividing spaces according to their needs. They negotiate common and personal spaces, as well as their relationship with the neighbourhood (Caciagli, 2019). As political actors, they represent housing practices excluded from conventional, market-led models (Cattaneo & Squatting Europe Kollective, 2014). When organised within housing or social movements, squatters move from being individuals seeking shelter to being participants in collective struggles for housing rights, as seen in Spin Time Labs (Caciagli, 2019). The negotiation of strategies contrasts with market-driven housing, which frames renters as isolated consumers rather than collective agents. Connecting squats to social housing would mean adopting engagement policies with squatters and paving the way for formalisation policies, as seen with Porto Fluviale.

ENDURANCE AND TIME — AFTER THE SQUAT

While squatting is often a response to immediate necessity, a future vision of social housing should include the lessons of long-term projects and their formalisation. The constant act of resistance and negotiating allows us to see these projects as part of a city existing in dynamic spaces of becoming rather than as a static surface (Massey, 2005). It is essential to recognise the value of squats because they have the potential to revitalise neighbourhoods, strengthen social bonds, and create inclusive urban environments.

East of Rome as archipelago of public housing, autonomous cultural centres and occupied buildings.
(Author: Diego Martínez 2023)

As practitioners, educators, designers, activists, or anyone invested in the universal right to housing, we must advocate for robust state-provided social housing policies. We must also recognise squatting and other non-state housing initiatives as legitimate socio-spatial models and facilitate pathways towards formalisation. This will allow for participatory, community-led urban transformation.

If we see housing not only as units and buildings, but also as a practice of participation, solidarity, and urban citizenship, then we can create more vibrant and connected communities. Squats demonstrate that sustainable and equitable cities can emerge whenever different groups work together to adapt, inhabit, and care for urban spaces.

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DIEGO MARTINEZ
is an architect living and working in Vienna. His dissertation examines informally occupied large-scale buildings and their potential to be understood as hybrid spatial typologies that inform new forms of collective living within the urban context.

A Green Utopia for Social Housing?

Article by
Julia Dorner

As a starting point for thinking about the future of social housing, it is helpful to know how this type of housing manifests itself today and how it is defined. Most people will readily use the term with a clear picture in their head of what social housing is, what it approximately looks like, and what its target group is. It is seldom appreciated in everyday life that it is not a monolithic entity, but a rather vague concept that can be – and has been – defined and designed in a plethora of ways. At the same time, the diversity of conceptions is regularly discussed in academia.

Something most definitions and national legislative designs agree on is that social housing is not directed at the general public, but a more or less strictly defined target group (Granath Hansson and Lundgren, 2019; Krapp and Vaché, 2022). Beyond this, who owns and provides it, and the form it takes, may vary substantially between cultures and countries, as well as other forms of support for housing provision, such as subsidies or regulation, if these are part of social housing.

As a PhD student investigating the relationship between green space and inequality, my utopia for the future of social housing is clear. Urban green spaces in the form of parks, street green, and green facades or roofs, are important for the health and well-being of urban dwellers (Huang and Lin, 2023; Iungman et al., 2023) and help mitigate the effects of climate change (Rahman et al., 2020; Schwaab et al., 2021). Therefore, the future of social housing needs to be green. At the same time, people with a lower socioeconomic status frequently face a much higher exposure to adverse environmental influences (Ganzleben and Kazmierczak, 2020).

Community garden in Ocupação 9 de Julho, São Paolo. (Photo: Julia Dorner)

This makes a green future of social housing even more necessary, so that the less well-off also enjoy the benefits of urban green spaces. Widely available green social housing could also help soften the effects of a worrying trend we are currently seeing around the world: new urban green spaces can lead to rising housing costs and, thus, the displacement of underprivileged inhabitants, a process called 'green gentrification' (Bockarjova et al., 2020; Anguelovski et al., 2022).
Another approach to prevent green living from being enjoyed only by those who can afford it would be to supplement future green social housing with further regulation. Tools such as rent control prohibit private owners from raising rents and, therefore, profiting from public investments in urban greening at the expense of tenants. While this is not classically understood as social housing in Austria, my research shows that it has the potential to mitigate the effects of urban green on housing costs.

Thus, the clear answer from this strand of research is that, in the future, social housing will need to ensure accessibility to urban green for as many people as possible. This can be achieved by using a classically targeted approach to focus on groups of lower socioeconomic status and make sure that urban green is included in social housing projects. Moreover, by including tools such as rent control, we can further help mitigate the unwanted effects of public investment in urban green. Concurrently, one person's utopia may very well be another's dystopia.

What happens to the person with severe pollen allergies in the green utopia? Or with the person who needs a car if car parks have been sacrificed for green spaces? Despite the inevitable divergence of individual needs, current research indicates that making the future of social housing greener will have positive outcomes for the health and well-being of most inhabitants. But no matter how social housing develops in the future, it will not have a single manifestation fitting all cultural, local and individual needs.

Public park: Tenente Siqueira Campos, São Paolo. (Photos: Julia Dorner)

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JULIA DORNER
is a PhD student in Spatial Planning at TU Wien, focusing on urban and housing research. Her doctoral research explores the intersection of environmental and social inequalities, with a methodological focus on spatial and quantitative analyses.

Beyond a Commodity

Housing as a Social Right and Public Service

Article by
Bárbara Damasceno

Adequate housing is, above all, a fundamental and non-negotiable human right recognized in various countries, both in national instruments and international treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which impose the duty to guarantee decent housing conditions for all citizens on the State. Housing – in its physical, social, and economic dimensions – is the gateway to other social rights that are essential to social reproduction.

Despite strong evidence regarding the importance of housing when addressing poverty and social vulnerability, if we analyse the Brazilian context over recent decades, we can observe a trend towards commodification. This has been facilitated by a greater freedom of the real estate market as the agent in charge of housing policy. Moreover, this has been accompanied by a significant reduction in the State's capacity to offer a public housing service in cooperation with the private sector and by housing sector deregulation (Cardoso & Lago, 2013; Rolnik et al., 2015). Indeed, the persistence of housing as a social problem among lower-income groups and the implementation of inequalities have become two sides of the same coin in Brazil.

PARTICULARITIES OF HOUSING POLICY

Public policies, understood as political decisions that materialize the choices made by a given government, are sets of decisions, norms, and rules structured and implemented whose purpose is to address, intervene in, or propose solutions to widely acknowledged issues that affect the life of a large portion of society.

The specific case of housing policy displays some important characteristics; it is a form of intervention that directly impacts the provision of a special commodity. This is because housing, besides being a basic need, has a high added value, their production involves a complex process, and their consumption is indivisible since it is tied to another commodity: urban land.

According to Valença (2003), their high added value is the result of a complex production process: involves a large number of operations, several types of worker, and a significant volume of components. This is because their production involves and attracts various interests and agents present in the urban space, has a long time span, low liquidity, and a pro-cyclical nature, being subject to changes in economic and political conditions.

For this reason, traditionally Brazilian federal housing policy has been multifaceted, encompassing the provision of urban infrastructure, construction funding and access to credit for consumption, land regulation, and coordination among various segments of society linked to this sector, among other things. Nevertheless, the main form of public action across the national territory consists of large-scale construction of new housing, with an emphasis on private property.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND TENDENCIES

The 'social problem of housing' is a term used here to address scarce or inadequate housing, as well as adverse effects on the full exercise of citizenship (owing to the denial of rights). Far from being an issue that exclusively concerns countries with less advanced economies – although in these settings it certainly assumes more dramatic proportions – it affects an increasing number of people around the world. As a result of overlapping deprivations of basic rights, low-income segments of society face a lack of, inadequacy, or difficulty in maintaining access to decent housing in cities.

In the current Brazilian context, transformations in the capitalist accumulation pattern and the growing financialization of housing policy have imposed a new logic on the design of public policies aiming to implement social rights[1]. This reflects a fiscal crisis of the State which, when associated with the restructuring of surplus appropriation patterns in the world system, has imposed substantial transformations on the forms of rights recognition and the provision of public goods and services (Royer et al., 2021).

As argued by Royer (2009), in order to ensure greater profitability and the security of investments allocated to the housing sector, the State has begun to reposition its policy on the basis of market logics and capital accumulation patterns – perhaps under the pressure of the mounting demand for housing and of the real estate market. According to analyses of the recent trajectory of Brazilian housing policy, this has implied abandoning the prioritization of universal rights and guaranteed well-being in favour of new profit opportunities.

Although this process has unfolded in a distinct manner in each country, it generally reflects a logic whereby housing as a fundamental right has been hollowed out, leaving only its market dimension. According to Martins and Lira (2018), this occurred because, within a logic of capital reproduction and power relations, social needs have progressively been captured by the needs of capital.

TOWARDS A POLICY THAT PRIORITIZES RIGHTS

In order to illustrate the harmful impacts of a public policy that considers housing according to its exchange value, as well as its potential intensification of the social problem of housing, we will examine the case of Brazil's largest housing programme: Minha Casa Minha Vida. According to official data from the federal government, by 2019 the programme had contracted approximately 5.5 million housing units throughout the country, an unprecedented volume achieved in just 10 years. However, the total housing deficit for that same year was 5.8 million homes according to Fundação João Pinheiro (FJP).

Although it is no easy task to reverse the course of social housing policy, it is necessary for the State to turn its attention to the specificities of the housing issue and place this right within the context of social policy and urban development. This implies a new political structure and implementation logic that seeks to coordinate the urban, social, and economic aspects inherent to housing.

Although housing policy in Brazil is increasingly complex and difficult in terms of regulation, financing, and management, beyond political rhetoric, addressing the current and future scenario requires seeking alternative models of public policies that are coordinated and appropriate to confront the market-oriented logic that has allowed for a massive deepening of inequalities among the most vulnerable segments and the formation of new patterns of urban exclusion.

1 The financialization of housing policy in Brazil has come to be guided not only by the introduction of market governance principles into the public agenda but, also, by the structuring of a closed circuit of guarantees, as the State has taken on the role of 'tying up loose ends' to ensure the security and profitability of its bonds in the operationalization (Abreu, Barcella & Melazzo, 2024, p. 109).

Despite the limits of a housing policy facing a global trend of worsening urban living conditions and the advance of individual solutions that ignore structural needs, it is necessary to prioritize the topic of social housing in the public, budgetary, and political debate. This must be accompanied by state initiatives that break with the erratic legacy of prioritizing housing policy as a tool for accumulation and the facilitation of real estate and financial market interests. Furthermore, the main challenge posed by the Brazilian situation in the coming years will be to rescue the social function of housing and structure it as a public service, strengthening the role of the State as a guarantor of rights and overcoming the limits imposed by neoliberalism on social and spatial justice.

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BÁRBARA DAMASCENO

Bárbara Damasceno is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo. Her research focuses on the relationship between the implementation of housing policy and the reduction of social vulnerability.

▲
Different types of social housing complexes built in the state of São Paulo, Brazil.
(Photos: Bárbara Caetano Damasceno)

The Future of Social Housing

A Multidisciplinary, Innovative, and Sustainable Approach to the Renewal of Self-Built Homes in Brazil

Article by
Marcella Franco de Andrade

Informal housing is an urban phenomenon encountered in various regions of the world, especially in countries in the Global South. It constitutes a popular expression of ordinary people in the face of the structural exclusion imposed by dominant urban models, and is actively produced by the state's own logic. Indeed, the state selectively regulates informality, tolerating or criminalising it according to political and economic interests (Roy, 2005). The growth of these informal areas is not only the result of rural exodus or population growth but, also, of neoliberal policies, cuts in public investment and the absence of inclusive urban planning (Davis, 2006).

In this sense, in Brazil in particular, and Latin America in general, the model of an exclusionary and patriarchal city prevails; it rejects nature and does not provide adequate living conditions for a large part of its population.

These are cities planned to concentrate income and to exclude, which has resulted in socio-spatial segregation, social inequality, and the disorganisation of urban space. In this context, housing has come to be treated as a commodity; the most vulnerable population has occupied peripheral areas, informal settlements and slums, often without any infrastructure, basic public services and/or integration with the urban network (Rolnik, 2015).

Thus, in Brazil, self-build has become a means of access to housing for low-income groups, with incomes of up to €716

per month. These homes are built without government oversight, technical guidance, or adequate resources, resulting in substandard housing that leads to harmful environmental impacts and public health hazards. Understanding informal housing requires us to go beyond discourses of criminalisation or welfare, and recognise it as an integral – albeit unequal inequitable? – part of contemporary global urbanisation.

The notion of adequate housing goes far beyond simple access to physical shelter. It is a fundamental human right that aims to guarantee a decent standard of living for all. This right encompasses several aspects, such as: security of tenure; access to services, materials and infrastructure; economic accessibility; habitability; physical accessibility; appropriate location; and cultural adequacy (UN, 2009).

Data reveals that more than 1.8 billion people worldwide are in need of adequate housing, and more than 1 billion live in informal settlements (UN, 2020). Brazil counts approximately 212.6 million inhabitants and 90.7 million dwellings. Of these, 11.4 million are vacant, 6.7 million are used occasionally, and 72.4 million are permanently occupied. In addition, there is a demand for approximately 6.2 million new homes, and 26.5 million dwellings are considered inadequate, of which 12.2 million have structural problems and need renovation (Brazil, 2022; IBGE, 2022).

Given this dire situation, it is essential to develop a set of integrated public policy measures that go beyond housing production. These might include: the renovation of self-built homes and urban improvements; the redevelopment of vacant properties in urban centres; and social rental housing, cooperatives and collectives that combine ownership and tenure, among solutions that promote a social and sustainable approach. The future of social housing must break with the historically exclusionary model of Latin American cities and adopt technical, scientific and social innovations, sustainable practices, and policies that prioritise life and human relations.

Participatory public policies combined with urban planning, and collaboration between government, the private sector and civil society are essential to create effective, lasting and socially integrated solutions. Joining up social and economic public policies will allow for strategies that are financed and coordinated, and can be adjusted to the specific realities of each territory. Popular participation will involve residents in the construction of solutions that meet the real needs of their communities. Urban planning will play a key role in addressing historical inequalities and guaranteeing the right to the city. As for coordination between different sectors, it will broaden access to resources, stimulate innovation, and strengthen the sustainability of the initiatives implemented.

Data on inadequate housing in Brazil highlights the need for ongoing technical and financial support from the state. In the 12.2 million dwellings affected with structural problems, 34 million Brazilians – or approximately one sixth of the population – live in precarious conditions. A lack of private bathrooms, inadequate water storage, unsafe roofs, dirt floors, and multifunctional rooms used as bedrooms: these examples illustrate the poor quality of such dwellings. Furthermore, there is no mandatory minimum percentage allocated to housing in the Brazilian public budget, unlike for health and education. Housing funds and programmes receive variable financial support, depending on the political priorities of the government and the annual approval of the federal budget.

Municipal renovation programmes based on the Federal Law on Technical Assistance for Social Housing (Brazil, 2008) can contribute significantly to meeting the demand for adequate housing. Such programmes should consider notions such as adequate housing, flexibility and autonomy, in addition to promoting universality and equity. The use of innovative technologies, sustainable materials and responsible construction practices will be essential in order to reduce environmental impact and enable large-scale solutions.

In summary, the future of social housing points to a multidisciplinary, innovative and sustainable approach, contributing to fairer, more resilient and inclusive cities.

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▲ Formal city in the foreground and informal city in the background in São João del-Rei / Minas Gerais / Brazil. (Photo: Marcella Franco de Andrade)

MARCELLA FRANCO DE ANDRADE
is an architect and urban planner with a PhD in progress at the University of São Paulo. She teaches and conducts research at the Federal University of São João del-Rei, focusing on the social right to housing and on policies for renovating self-built and inadequate homes in Brazil.

Ankündigung Publikation

Transformation des Bestandes

Der Sammelband Transformation des Bestandes vereint Beiträge aus Architektur und Raumplanung,

Architekturtheorie,
Bauphysik,
Bodenpolitik,
Denkmalpflege,
Entwurfslehre,
Kunst,
Landschaftsplanung,
Ökonomie,
Planungskultur,
Raumsoziologie,
Rechtswissenschaft,
Stadtforschung,
Tragwerk,

die sich mit der Transformation des Bestandes auseinandersetzen. Die Vielfalt der theoretischen, methodischen und praktischen Zugänge zeigen, wie komplex die Anforderungen und Lösungsansätze in Forschung, Lehre und Planungspraxis bei einer Fokussierung auf den Bestand sind.

Der Band richtet sich an Wissenschaftler_innen, Lehrende, Studierende und Praktiker_innen, die sich mit nachhaltiger Transformation im Planen und Bauen beschäftigen und an einem integrativen Verständnis räumlicher Veränderung mitwirken wollen.

Herausgeber:innen:
Dragana Damjanovic, Lorenzo De Chiffre, Madlyn Miessgang, Heike Oevermann und Johannes Suitner

Die Publikation erschien im November 2025 bei TU Academic Press

Rückblick archdiploma 25

Nachdenken über den Bestand

Vom 20. bis 21. November fand im Funkhaus in der Argentinierstraße die archdiploma 25, die Ausstellung von Diplomprojekten aus Architektur und Raumplanung der TU Wien, statt.

Als erste thematisch fokussierte Diplomausstellung der Fakultät für Architektur und Raumplanung an der TU Wien stellt die archdiploma 2025 das Nachdenken über den Bestand in seiner ganzen Vielfalt von Wissen, Methoden und Technologien in den Vordergrund. Die archdiploma 25 zeigt in 7 Cluster wichtige Fokussierungen in dem breiten Feld des Umgangs mit dem Bestand. Dabei wurden die materiellen und immateriellen Dimensionen sowie Skalierungen und Maßstäblichkeiten von Regionen über den Städtebau und einzelne Objekte bis hin zum architektonischen Detail in den Blick genommen.

Kurator:innen:
Heike Oevermann, Harald R. Stühlinger
Assistenz: Nina Lorein

Alle Projekte zum Nachlesen
archdiploma.tuwien.ac.at

Neue Publikationen in der Schriftenreihe

„Soziale Innovation und nachhaltige Transformation in der Stadtentwicklung“

Mit zwei neuen Nachlesen zeigt die Schriftenreihe der future.lab Innovationswerkstatt, inwiefern soziale Innovationen dazu beitragen können, Städte klimaresilienter, gerechter und lebenswerter zu gestalten.

In „Aktivismus und Planung – Widerspruch oder Chance?“ beleuchten Lena Hohenkamp und Katrin Hagen das Spannungsfeld zwischen formeller Planung und aktivistischen Interventionen: Wie ermöglicht taktischer Urbanismus schnelle und kostengünstige Veränderungen und schafft Akzeptanz für langfristige Veränderungen? Sie thematisieren die Risiken einer Institutionalisierung und fragen, wie Verwaltungsstrukturen aktivistische Impulse unterstützen können, ohne sie zu vereinnahmen. Erfahrungen aus den Projekten *Hard am Limit* und *TIKTAK Galilei* (ifoer & Landscape, TU Wien) werden um internationale Perspektiven von Prostorož und Agency Apéro erweitert.

In der Nachlese „Lebenswerte Straßen“ rücken Steven März und Ruth Höpler Straßen als Schlüsselräume der Transformation in den Mittelpunkt. Sie diskutieren, wie diese zwischen Mobilitätsansprüchen, Klimaanpassung und Aufenthaltsqualität neu ausgehandelt werden – und warum Konflikte dabei unvermeidbar, aber gestaltbar sind. Neben dem Projekt *LesSON – Lebenswerte Straßen, Orte und Nachbarschaften* (Wuppertal Institut) zeigen die Beispiele *Mobility Benefit Districts* (MOVE TU Wien) und *Raus aus dem Asphalt* (Stadt Wien MA28) sozial innovative Ansätze, die Straßen in Orte der Begegnung verwandeln.

Es wird deutlich: Transformation gelingt, wenn Städte mutig experimentieren, unterschiedliche Perspektiven einbinden und öffentliche Räume als Treiber sozial-ökologischen Wandels begreifen.

Hier geht ’s zur Open Access Schriftenreihe:
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Staffel 4

ZUKUNFT STADT Podcast

Mit einer Spezialfolge zur archdiploma 25 ging der Podcast der Fakultät für Architektur und Raumplanung in die 4. Staffel. Auch in dieser stehen Fragestellungen rund um Stadtentwicklung und der gebauten Umwelt im Zentrum der Auseinandersetzung.

Der Podcast beleuchtet vielfältige Aspekte nachhaltiger Raumentwicklung, mit besonderem Fokus auf den Umgang mit den bestehenden raumrelevanten Strukturen. Dabei wird untersucht, wie sich unser Verständnis von Raum und Architektur, Planung und Entwurf sowie Prozessen und Instrumenten im Kontext einer sozial-ökologischen Transformation verändern muss.

Das Programm umfasst verschiedene Formate: Thematisch fokussierte Gesprächsrunden, Kooperationen mit externen Partner:innen sowie Vorstellungen von Publikationen und Einblicke in die aktuelle Forschung und Lehre der Fakultät für Architektur und Raumplanung.

In dieser Staffel wird im Rahmen einer Mini-Serie auf die Inititaive *HouseEurope*! aufmerksam gemacht.

Der ZUKUNFT STADT Podcast ist eine Kooperation des future.lab und des Forschungsbereichs Örtliche Raumplanung (ifoer) und wird von Lukas Bast, Larissa Benk, Lena Hohenkamp, Lisa-Marie Kramer, Madlyn Miessgang und Nico Schleicher produziert.

Den Podcast hören? Überall da, wo es Podcasts gibt (Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, Castbox, etc.)!

Alle Infos zum Podcast und zu den Folgen: futurelab.tuwien.ac.at/podcast

Initiative

House Europe

HouseEurope! ist eine parlamentarische Bürgerinitiative auf europäischer Ebene. Ihr Ziel ist es, den Abriss von Gebäuden zu reduzieren und stattdessen Sanierung, Wiederverwendung und Umbau zu fördern. Dahinter steht die Überzeugung, dass der Gebäudebestand nicht nur eine ökologische Ressource ist, sondern auch eine kulturelle und soziale.

Jede Minute wird in Europa ein Gebäude zerstört – nicht durch Naturkatastrophen, sondern von Menschenhand. Während einige daran verdienen, zahlen wir den Preis: mit steigenden Mieten und steigenden Temperaturen.

Wie lösen wir diese Probleme? Die Initiative *HouseEurope!* fordern neue EU-Gesetze, die bezahlbaren Wohnraum und das Klima schützen!

Der Bausektor folgt einem System, das uns beibringt, Risiko statt Potenzial zu sehen – und anzunehmen, dass neu immer besser ist als alt. Dieses System fördert Neubau und macht Renovierung und Umnutzung nicht nur teurer, sondern auch deutlich schwieriger. Das kannst du ändern! Deshalb fordert *HouseEurope!* ein Recht auf Weiternutzung: **Es braucht 1 Million Unterschriften für Gesetze die leistbaren Wohnraum und das Klima schützen!**

Die Initiative HouseEurope läuft noch bis 31.0112026.

Unterzeichne jetzt!

fuTUre fit

cycleFIT

Nachhaltig Bewegen an der TU Wien

Mit cycleFIT entsteht an der TU Wien ein umfassendes Projekt, das Studierende und Mitarbeitende dabei unterstützt, ihren Alltag klimafreundlicher und komfortabler zu gestalten. Ziel ist es, Barrieren abzubauen, Radfahren attraktiver zu machen und nachhaltige Mobilität als Teil des Campuslebens zu verankern.

Trotz der zentralen Lage der TU Wien und einer überwiegend jungen Zielgruppe ist der Anteil der Radfahrenden im TU-Alltag im Vergleich zu anderen Universitäten gering. cycleFIT setzt genau hier an: Mit neuen, sicheren Fahrradabstellanlagen, Dusch- und Umkleidemöglichkeiten sowie digitalen Tools wie Stellplatzmanagement und Routenplaner schafft das Projekt konkrete Verbesserungen für den täglichen Weg zur Universität.

Ebenso wichtig ist die gemeinsame Entwicklung im Reallabor TU Wien: Studierende, Lehrende und Mitarbeitende entwerfen Ideen, erproben Prototypen und gestalten Maßnahmen aktiv mit. Ergänzt durch Aktionstage, Challenges und Bewusstseinsbildung entsteht ein lebendiger Prozess, der nicht nur die Campusmobilität stärkt, sondern auch zur klimafitten Stadt Wien beiträgt.

cycleFIT steht für mehr Gesundheit, Klimaschutz und Lebensqualität am Campus. Es stärkt das Gemeinschaftsgefühl, steigert die Attraktivität der TU Wien als Arbeits- und Studienort und setzt ein klares Zeichen für eine moderne Mobilitätskultur.

Projektteam: Kurt Weninger, Barbara Laa, Ulrich Leth, Florian Pühringer

Das Projekt wird im Rahmen des Strategieentwicklungsprozesses der TU Wien (fuTUre fit) gefördert.

What is the future.lab?

The future.lab is a platform for experimental and inter- as well as transdisciplinary research and teaching in urban and spatial development at the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning of the TU Wien. The platform is intended to create opportunities and promote initiatives that encourage research, teaching and practice to engage in an open exchange and strengthen their profile. In this way, the platform challenges teachers, students and colleagues from planning practice to develop concrete projects and initiatives and to translate the claim of a transdisciplinary scientific practice into concrete action.

NETWORKING AND BUNDLING OF CONTENT

The platform builds on the research fields and funding priorities of the TU Wien and the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning. The program supports the discussion on concepts relevant to space and development, on strategies and projects from the fields of architecture, urban development, spatial planning, urban management and urban governance. Furthermore, it aims to promote the dialogue between spatial sciences and planning practice.

With the magazine, the future.lab is pursuing its goal of bringing established research focuses at the faculty to to public attention and making them visible.

FURTHER INFORMATION

futurelab.tuwien.ac.at

CONTACT

Madlyn Miessgang
+43 (0) 1 58801-25009
madlyn.miessgang@tuwien.ac.at

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EDITORS

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Selim Banabak, Bárbara Damasceno, Charlotte Damböck, Julia Dorner, Silke Fischer, Marcella Franco de Andrade Pratap Jayaram, Bernadette Krejs, Judith M. Lehner, Diego Martínez, Marco Patruno

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