

Persistent structures of public housing in the face of changing dwelling practices. A case study of Vienna's municipal housing stock.

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Abstract

Vienna has a significant history of social housing, dating back to the era of “Red Vienna” in the 1920s, and it currently maintains a high percentage of social housing that includes, to almost equal shares, municipal housing owned by the city of Vienna and dwellings built by limited-profit housing associations. This paper concentrates on municipal housing, which is the most affordable housing segment, and discusses challenges arising from changes in lifestyle and household arrangements in the light of a housing stock largely dating back to the interwar and post-war eras. Based on historical and statistical data on the housing stock, an analysis of the allocation mechanisms and in-depth interviews with housing seekers in Vienna, this paper identifies normative expectations arising from the architectural structure but also from the allocation practices of municipal housing which present challenges, for instance, to young adults wanting to share an apartment or to single parents. At the same time, this approach illustrates the potential of integrating a material culture perspective with a policy perspective that is commonly followed in housing studies for understanding how distinct social groups may face normative constraints in their household arrangements due to the features of the housing stock made available to them through specific access regulations.

Keywords: Public housing, Structures of the housing stock, Allocation mechanisms, Changing household arrangements.

Introduction

Housing systems around the world encounter a range of challenges, such as housing affordability, changes in household composition and lifestyles, or ecological transformation. However, the perception of these issues as challenges and the ways to address them vary depending on socio-demographic, economic and national contexts. This paper focuses on the case of Vienna, the capital of Austria, which is frequently cited as a leading example in addressing affordability challenges through a large social housing system. The cost structure, allocation mechanisms, and social composition of this social housing system have been extensively researched, highlighting its potential (KADI; LILIUS, 2022; REINPRECHT, 2014; TSENKOVA, 2022b) as well as its challenges (KADI, 2015; KADI et al., 2021b; REINPRECHT, 2017). This paper takes a slightly different perspective, looking at the intersection of affordability, access regulation and normative settings within the built environment. It combines insights from material culture studies and policy analysis inspired by housing studies to explore potential hurdles faced by the most affordable segment of the housing market in adapting to the needs of evolving lifestyles and household structures. Based on qualitative research into the experiences of those seeking housing in Vienna, an analysis of the legal allocation mechanisms, and historical and statistical data concerning the housing stock, this study exemplarily discusses specific areas of tension. The contribution aims to identify productive avenues for future research, but it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of the topic.

The paper first presents an overview of the Viennese housing system, explaining its international specificity and the role of municipal housing. It then situates the research theoretically between two relevant lines of inquiry – material culture studies on the one hand and housing studies on the other hand – before the empirical basis of the paper is briefly outlined. In the main section, the paper will describe the characteristics of the Viennese municipal housing stock and will then focus on two household types that face difficulties in finding adequate housing solutions despite being in part explicitly addressed by the system of municipal housing: young adults aiming to share a flat, and single parents. Finally, this paper will draw conclusions regarding the prospects of combining housing studies and material culture studies.

Social Housing in Vienna

In the context of the increasing scarcity of affordable housing in many European countries, Austria is often cited as a prime model for upholding a robust social housing system. In contrast, neoliberal reforms initiated in the 1970s have resulted in residualization of social housing in many other countries (KADI and LILIUS, 2022; SCANLON et al., 2014; TSENKOVA, 2022a). In Vienna, the capital city, the proportion of social housing is even higher than in other parts of the country. Here, 43% of all housing units are designated as social housing¹. This is divided almost equally between limited-profit housing usually built with public subsidies² (21%) and municipal housing

owned and administered by the City of Vienna (22%). Private rental units make up for 33% of the housing stock, while less than 20% are owner-occupied properties (KÖSSL, 2023).

Municipal housing is the most affordable housing sector (Figure 1). For limited-profit housing the average rent is only slightly higher than that of municipal housing. However, there is a significant difference in rent levels between older and newer buildings. Moreover, especially for dwellings that have been built more recently, tenants are required to make an equity contribution³ of up to several hundred Euro per square meter, which presents a considerable financial obstacle for low-income households (GUTHEIL-KNOPP-KIRCHWALD; KADI, 2014; MARQUART; GLASER, 2020). Over the past decades, the financial barrier has become more significant as new constructions increasingly favor limited-profit housing over municipal housing (KADI, 2015). However, since 2012 a portion of the subsidized housing units must be built as so-called SMART apartments. These have a lower rent and equity contribution as well as very efficient floorplans in order to reduce housing costs, making limited-profit housing more accessible to lower-income groups in the last years (MARQUART; GLASER, 2020; LITSCHAUER; FRIESENECKER, 2022). In the private rental market, the rents for housing stock built before 1945 are regulated and depend on the condition, equipment, and location of the dwelling, but in practice many apartments are rented out above the legal limit (ROSIFKA; POSTLER, 2010). Rents for dwellings built after 1945 are not regulated and have increased significantly in recent years (KADI et al., 2021a).

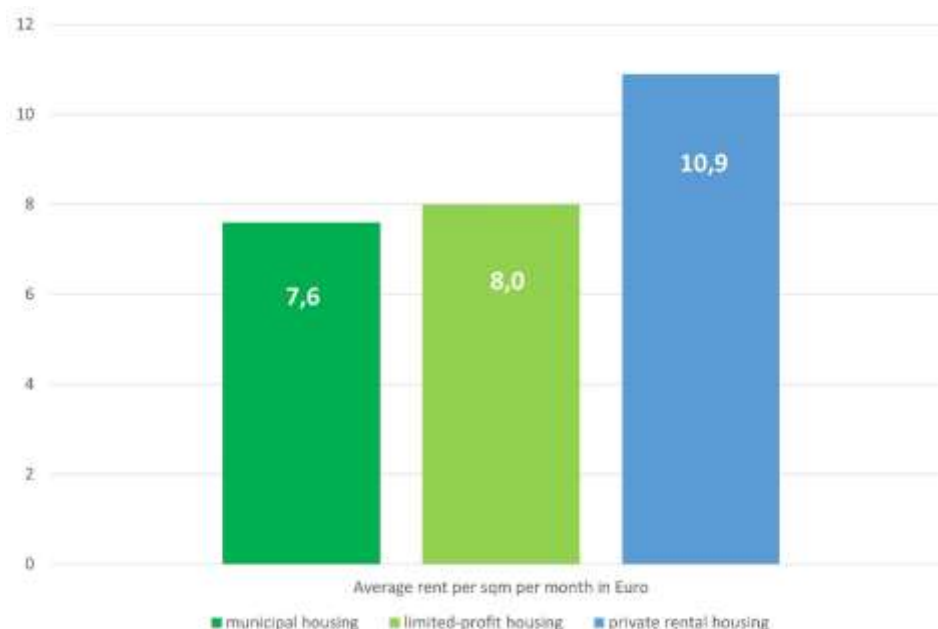


Figure 1 – Average rent per square meter in the different segments of the rental market in Vienna, 2022 (Source: Kössl 2023, Statistik Austria).

Vienna's social housing policy follows a 'housing for all' approach, with the goal of maintaining a diverse social mix within housing estates. Thus, income limits for both municipal and subsidized housing are set at a high level, which includes approximately

80% of the population (LITSCHAUER; FRIESENECKER, 2022; TSENKOVA, 2022b). However, there are access barriers based on nationality, legal and familial status as well as time of residence in Vienna, which will be discussed in more detail in another section of this paper. Individuals who cannot access the social housing system due to these factors or because their situation does not allow for long waiting times are forced to enter the private market where rents are higher and the unregulated mode of allocation leaves space for discriminatory practices (AIGNER, 2019; KARASZ et al., 2022: 44f). Thus, while Vienna does offer reasonably priced housing for wide parts of the population, there are also groups that face significant challenges in the housing market. Studies (e.g. FRANZ; GRUBER, 2018; KADI 2015; REINPRECHT, 2017) have shown that access to affordable housing is especially difficult for individuals who are new to the city, who have a migration background, low income or live in atypical household constellations.

While considerable attention has been paid to the forms of economic and formal exclusion of certain groups from the social housing system, the implications of the qualities and layout of the existing housing stock have not been addressed to the same extent. Qualitatively, there are significant differences in the housing stock that forms the basis of Vienna's relatively high housing affordability. Vienna's rent-regulated private rental housing stock largely originates from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Initially built to accommodate the rapidly growing working-class population, most of these dwellings were of poor quality. However, they have since been refurbished, although there are still variations in quality (MUSIL et al., 2022). More recent subsidized limited-profit housing, on the other hand, is known for its particularly high quality since subsidies and building grounds are assigned through competitions that assess projects based on criteria such as architectural quality and affordability, as well as ecological and social sustainability (AZEVEDO et al., 2022). As these competitions often focus on urgent social themes, subsidized housing has become a key area of architectural innovation. For municipal housing, the situation is very different. The housing stock reflects the household structure and normative assumptions of the interwar and postwar decades due to a strong tradition during that time. However, new construction activity is limited, which hinders the sector's ability to adapt to changes in household composition and lifestyle. As municipal housing is the most affordable field of housing, it is mostly those with limited financial possibilities in the housing market who are affected by the implications of a housing stock that dates to times in which housing demands were very different.

Crossroads between architectural anthropology and housing studies

This paper examines the relationship between two distinct areas of research that are typically pursued separately. Firstly, it draws from the field of material culture studies and the anthropology and sociology of architecture to provide insight into how the built environment shapes everyday structures of dwelling. Secondly, it is inspired by findings in housing studies that examine the accessibility of the housing market for specific groups, with a particular emphasis on barriers arising from affordability or legal constraints. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of merging these two perspectives in order to comprehend how distinct social groups may face normative



constraints in their household arrangements due to the features of the housing stock made available to them through specific access regulations.

There is a substantial amount of literature on the materiality of the home in the fields of material culture studies as well as architectural sociology and anthropology. Research on the relationship between the architectural form of dwellings and the normative routinization of everyday practices reaches back to Lévi-Strauss' structuralist analysis of "house societies" and subsequent research by Pierre Bourdieu on the symbolic order of and everyday practices within the Kabylean house (BUCHLI, 2013: 71-88). The "interrelations between buildings, people and ideas" (CARSTEN; HUGH-JONES, 1995: 1) have, since then, been considered with different research foci. While the concrete theoretical perspectives may differ, there is a general tendency to view the design of architecture as closely connected to normative assumptions of social relations and to recognize the significance of the built environment for everyday practices, however, without thinking of this relation in a deterministic way. Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga discuss the "mutually constituting relations between houses and families" (BIRDWELL-PHEASANT; LAWRENCE-ZÚÑIGA, 1999: 15), showing how specific types of dwellings evolved historically in the context of normative ideas of household organization and how actors find "their daily activities both enabled and constrained by the physical character of the house and its content" (ibid.: 9), but they also point to tensions, variations and transformations. Similarly, Thomas Gieryn describes buildings as stabilizing social life by giving "structure to social institutions, durability to social networks, persistence to behavior patterns", but he also states that "buildings stabilize *imperfectly*" (GIERYN, 2002: 35, original emphasis) and highlights the "potential restructuring by human agents" (GIERYN, 2002: 41). The tensions between stabilization and transformation as well as between material and human agency are also at the center of Miller's approach to the materiality of the home, comprising its architecture as well as furnishings and decorations. Rather than arguing for a clear and stable conceptualization of the relationship between the agency of materiality and of humans, he suggests an ethnographic approach towards the "fine-grained relationship between people and the material culture of the home" (MILLER, 2001: 15) that takes into account both sides as sources of influence and considers their embeddedness in a wide range of social relations, political and economic forces.

An aspect that is particularly important for the questions at the center of this paper is the long-term stability of the built environment. Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga emphasize the conservative character of European house forms that persist over time, presenting households with ideas of the proper way to live that may extend back into the distant past (BIRDWELL-PHEASANT; LAWRENCE-ZÚÑIGA, 1999: 9). Therefore, it is important to understand how ideals of household organization and concepts of proper family life have influenced housing forms that have endured materially. Art historians, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have documented that the constitution of the nuclear family as a core principle of social organization for the middle classes in the 19th century has deeply influenced housing construction, leading towards the internal differentiation of spaces. For example, dwellings were increasingly characterized by a clear distinction between various degrees of privacy as well as by a (hierarchical) separation between household members and functions of the home (BIRDWELL-PHEASANT; LAWRENCE-ZÚÑIGA, 1999; CIERAAD, 1999; LÖFGREN, 1990; HÄUSSERMANN; SIEBEL, 2000). While the concept of the nuclear family as the core

household unit has been widely preserved, the spatial organization within the family home and the associated hierarchies between genders and generations have undergone significant changes. However, this evolution of normative ideas of social order and domestic practices within a corresponding material environment was far from straightforward, as other studies focusing on changes in domestic organization illustrate. Attfield (1999), Cieraad (2002), and Van Caudenberg and Heynen (2004), for example, demonstrate that the introduction of the rational kitchen in the interwar period, associated with the image of the professional housewife, and the shift towards the open plan in the postwar period, signaling greater equality in the relations between household members but also mixing functions, were embraced differently depending on social class and regional context.

Creative adaptations of the possibilities and limitations offered by the materiality of dwellings have more recently been documented by a number of studies, referring to material modifications, adjustments of everyday practices and re-considerations of domestic norms. Aigner (2014), for example, has investigated the material appropriation and modification of Le Corbusier's experimental housing estates. Present-day tenants were found to develop strategies to align their dwellings with their practical needs and aesthetic preferences despite the site being considered a monument. In Eranil and Gürel's (2022) study of rural migrant women in Turkey who have been relocated to newly built social housing projects the focus is on everyday practices within the home. While struggling with the incompatibility between apartments' standardized layouts and their own dwelling practices, the women develop strategies to adapt the space at their disposal to their needs through alternative furnishings, modifications of thresholds within the house and the communal use of corridor spaces. The overcoming not only of spatial, but also of established social norms of dwelling is illustrated in Layne's (2000) work on the flexible uses of space by a single-mother-by-choice who keeps rearranging her home as well as restructuring the family's spatial practices according to the changing needs of herself and her children at different ages. In her repeated rearrangements she significantly breaks with notions of (marital) privacy and with the ideals of clear separations of family members and of functions within the home.

Housing not only represents a significant element in the organization of social relations in the domestic sphere, but also reflects personal taste, values, and social status. In this broader sense, it forms the basis of what is considered home. However, the physical structure of a dwelling does not necessarily dictate the possibilities for creating a home. In this context, Irene Cieraad (2010) distinguishes between material and mental home-making, conceptualizing both as ongoing processes that involve repeated evaluation of past and future visions, negotiation with other household members, and material arrangements like furnishings and decorations. In the context of limited housing options, Lutherova (2014) and Parutis (2011) have emphasized the provisional and partial character of home-making and the compromises people may make in their present dwelling arrangements in view of longer-term perspectives.

Approaches in material culture studies and the anthropology of architecture convincingly demonstrate the relevance and persistence of material structures in relation to how everyday life in the home and pertaining social ties are structured, but they also point to the potential malleability of materiality, practices, and interpretations. A question that has been addressed to a much lesser extent in material culture studies is how homes and

their inhabitants are matched. Notable exceptions include Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) comprehensive study of the French housing market and Elizabeth Shove's (1999) work on decision-making in the house building, buying and furnishing process. Both studies mainly refer to home-ownership and situate decision-making processes within possibilities and constraints based on the characteristics of the options available, financial circumstances as well as social aspirations and their negotiation with other household members. The importance of understanding the dynamics in the acquisition of housing has also been emphasized by Lutherova (2014), but her focus is more on how housing status influences modes of appropriation of the material environment as well as social relations with those who contribute to the acquisition in one way or another. While these studies focus on the role of home-owners and tenants as consumers, the matching of dwellings and tenants in fields in which choice is restricted not only by financial aspects but by the allocation process itself, such as public housing, has rather been tackled in the research field of housing studies.

Housing studies primarily focus on analyzing different housing regimes and assessing the accessibility of diverse housing sectors. A key inquiry in the context of social housing pertains to its targeting strategy, specifically how the groups that should be addressed by social housing are defined. This issue is typically discussed in terms of socio-economic status, highlighting the contrast between social housing systems with a universal approach, such as Vienna, that implement a mixed-income strategy for social housing (TSENKOVA, 2022b) and residualized social housing systems which target the most vulnerable parts of the population (JACOBS, 2019; CLARKE et al., 2022). Apart from identifying these various strategies in specific local contexts, a broader discourse exists on the subjective impacts imposed by these policies. It has been shown, for example, that the neoliberal call for limited social housing access is frequently connected to a concern that social housing provision may generate passive, welfare-dependent subjects (BRADLEY, 2014; KETTUNEN; RUONAVAARA, 2015). In response, several governments have devised schemes, such as choice-based letting, to enhance the responsibility of social tenants but also their opportunities for home-making in an appropriate environment (FLINT, 2003; FLINT, 2004; KULLBERG, 1997).

While much of the work in housing studies is dedicated to the analysis of policies and the economic framework of housing, there is also a considerable corpus of work dealing with the ways in which different groups of individuals are affected by the structures of housing systems. Studies have been conducted on the allocation mechanisms of social housing with respect to the expected outcome for particular groups depending on their economic and cultural capital and other resources (KULLBERG, 2002) and regarding the ways in which applicants are addressed as specific tenant subjects through bureaucratic processes (MORRIS et al. 2023, KEENE et al. 2023). However, these studies focus more on the allocation process as a form of governance or on the general housing outcome, but not on the specificities of the housing stock that is allocated. Another direction of research which includes the perspective of individuals and households deals with housing careers and the evolution of housing aspirations. These are usually discussed in connection with changes in housing systems, the labor market, financial frameworks, and state welfare systems. While this perspective comes close to questions raised in this contribution, potentially considering expectations of what a dwelling should offer in a particular biographical period, most research in this direction is dominated by a focus on tenure and a rational-choice perspective on housing

consumption, paying attention mainly to quality and size of dwellings (PREECE et al., 2019: 99f).

In summary, the fields of anthropology and sociology of architecture, as well as material culture studies, provide insights into the processes by which normative notions of dwelling are materialized. They also shed light on how these materializations facilitate and impede particular uses, how they relate to users' notions of privacy and intimacy, of gender or intergenerational relations, of household and neighborhood, and how they contribute to or challenge process of home-making. Additionally, they explore how these normative materializations are sometimes transformed and reinterpreted in everyday practices. To better understand appropriate fittings, incompatibilities and challenges that arise from the different historical and social backgrounds and ideas of builders and users of dwellings, it is also necessary to understand who is affected by which kind of materiality of home. This aspect has, however, received a lot less attention in material culture studies so far. In housing studies, on the other hand, discussions of the accessibility of the housing market, housing aspirations and choice within the housing market have been dominated by a focus on formal aspects such as tenure or size of dwellings. However, a nuanced approach towards more concrete material characteristics of housing has been rather scarce.

The relevance of connecting these questions has already been addressed in the 1960s by the French sociologist Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe who recognized the importance of understanding demographic and economic structures as well as everyday practices and family relations of different classes of the population in order to adapt housing to new requirements (CHOMBART DE LAUWE, 1961: 25f). The need for a more nuanced perspective on housing availability for specific groups has been recently emphasized in housing studies. David Clapham, for instance, highlights in housing usage by individuals and households based on their lifestyles. Therefore, he criticizes attempts to define quality of housing in a universal manner (CLAPHAM, 2010: 254). Similarly, Preece et al. (2019) argue for the need to broaden our understanding of the elements that drive aspirations beyond tenure. These elements may include factors such as layout and aesthetics, sustainability, and location. This aligns with recent conceptualizations in architectural anthropology that might connect materialities and access policies:

“Architecture does not just concern buildings as delimited designed objects but also involves mould and microbes, walls and views, sound and smell, and legal and financial structures. All of these interact in our ways of inhabiting the world, intervening in where and among whom we belong and how space is lived.”
(STENDER et al, 2022: 1)

In this line of thought, the present contribution aims to offer a glimpse into potential ways of combining the research perspectives of architectural anthropology, material culture studies and housing studies. Taking municipal housing in Vienna as an example, it aims to trace what can be gained from looking at access regulations in combination with the material properties of the housing stock in order to better understand possibilities and challenges for meeting needs and aspirations of different household types.

Empirical approach

This paper is based on data that was generated collectively in the interdisciplinary project “SPACE – Spatial Competition and Economic Policies” which was funded by the Austrian Science Fund from 2019 to 2024. In this context, I was part of a group of anthropologists and sociologists at the University of Vienna who analyzed the role of competition in the allocation of housing in the Viennese housing market. The more general results on allocation mechanisms in various fields of the housing market have been and will be published elsewhere. The implications of the layout of municipal flats and specific allocation mechanisms, which are the subject of this paper, were a topic that I elaborated individually, using data collected jointly in the project, but adding further data and developing new lines of interpretation.

Our group analyzed the housing market from two perspectives. Firstly, we examined the institutional framework of access to housing, including relevant laws and regulations as well as statistical data about the housing stock and housing prices. For the field of municipal housing, more specifically, we scrutinized allocation guidelines and conducted two interviews with a total of four staff members from institutions responsible for the allocation and administration of municipal housing (WI01-WI02). Our goal was to understand the structure and underlying intentions of the municipal housing system as well as changes in access criteria and allocation mechanisms over time. For this publication, I additionally gathered historical and statistical data on the evolution of the housing stock and its characteristics, including size, layout, and equipment of housing units.

On the other hand, we based our approach on the experiences, challenges, and strategies of housing seekers. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 individuals who were either currently searching for housing in Vienna or had recently moved into a new apartment. Some of them were accompanied in their search for a suitable flat and were interviewed repeatedly. Most cases were addressed via social media platforms, but we also included cases that were recruited via snowball sampling or via non-profit organizations that support refugees. The sample was selected according to the principle of contrasting cases (KELLE; KLUGE, 2010) in terms of age, socio-economic status, household composition, migration background and housing field (private rental, limited-profit or municipal housing). The participants in our study ranged in age from 19 to 60 years old, with the majority (54%) falling between the ages of 30 and 40. Their net income ranged from 600€ to 3,100€, with the majority (54%) falling between 1,000 and 2,000€. Their education levels ranged from compulsory education to higher university degrees. Approximately 50% of the individuals lived in single-person households. However, there were also instances where up to five people resided in a single household. The majority of the interviewees were searching for housing in multiple housing fields or considering doing so before ultimately focusing on one specific housing field. This reinforces the notion that Vienna has an integrated housing market (Kemeny et al. 2005), with overlaps typically occurring between private rental and limited-profit housing or between limited-profit housing and municipal housing. The interviews were conducted between late 2020 and early 2022 and were carried out face-to-face, online or by telephone, depending on the pandemic situation. They included questions about people’s housing biographies, about the reasons and context of their current search for housing, about their criteria for the new apartment and how these were adapted during

the search process, as well as about experiences and challenges during the search and strategies of dealing with these. For the analysis, we first applied an open coding technique using the software MaxQDA and then identified important themes that we dealt with in different publications. For each of these, we added a second stage of coding of the most relevant material that was directed by the research questions of the publications.

For this paper, I concentrated on cases in which individuals expressed difficulties in finding suitable municipal apartments matching their household forms. I engaged in an in-depth analysis of these cases in relation to the data gathered on allocation mechanisms and housing stock. To better contextualize the limited material available in our sample, I resorted to statistical data as well as other empirical studies that partly share aspects of my research interest. As the topic of the current paper emerged as a side-aspect of the research done within the project context, the cases which are presented later serve as a basis to raise questions that seem worthwhile to be discussed in more detail, but they do not offer a full elaboration of the issues addressed. Their role is rather exploratory in demonstrating the relevance of the approach suggested rather than exhaustive in the sense of a complete response regarding the research questions.

History, characteristics, and allocation of the Viennese municipal housing stock

The history of municipal housing dates back to the 1920s, when the Social Democratic Workers' Party obtained an absolute majority of seats in the Municipal Council. At that time, the main concern was the deplorable housing situation experienced by the working-class population. This was a result of the rapid growth of Vienna's population during the second half of the 19th century from about half a million over 2 million inhabitants by the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. MARCHART, 1984: 17-18; BRAHMS, 1987: 9-13; STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2016: 50). The majority of newcomers were workers from all parts of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy who lived in overcrowded buildings with poor ventilation and lighting and had access only to shared toilets and water supply (SIEDER, 1985).

As a result, the newly appointed Social-Democratic Municipal Council launched an extensive public housing program with the slogan "fresh air, light and sunshine" (STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2016: 59), resulting in the construction of more than 60,000 housing units between 1925 and 1934. Municipal buildings of that period were designed by well-known modernist architects, many of whom were inspired by the work of Otto Wagner. However, they were subject to strict guidelines regarding infrastructure, apartment size and layout, which were given by political stakeholders (BAUMANN, 2012: 25). These dwellings were primarily located in large housing estates with generous courtyards that included infrastructure such as public baths, playgrounds, laundry rooms, kindergartens, libraries, and many other amenities (BOUSSKA, 2017: 10, see also figure 2). The apartments ranged from 21 to 57 square meters and were equipped with toilets and kitchens but they still lacked a bathroom (MARCHART, 1984: 83; STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2016: 63). In typical floorplans, the bedroom or bedrooms needed

to be accessed through the living room or a combined kitchen/living room (MARCHART, 1984: 30, see also figures 3 and 4), which remains relevant for contemporary modes of use.



Figure 2 – The courtyard of a municipal housing estate constructed between 1924 and 1929, Sandeleitenhof, 1928 (Source: Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Fotosammlung C 1766M: 16., Wohnhausanlage Sandeleiten, 3.3.2.FC1.1766M).

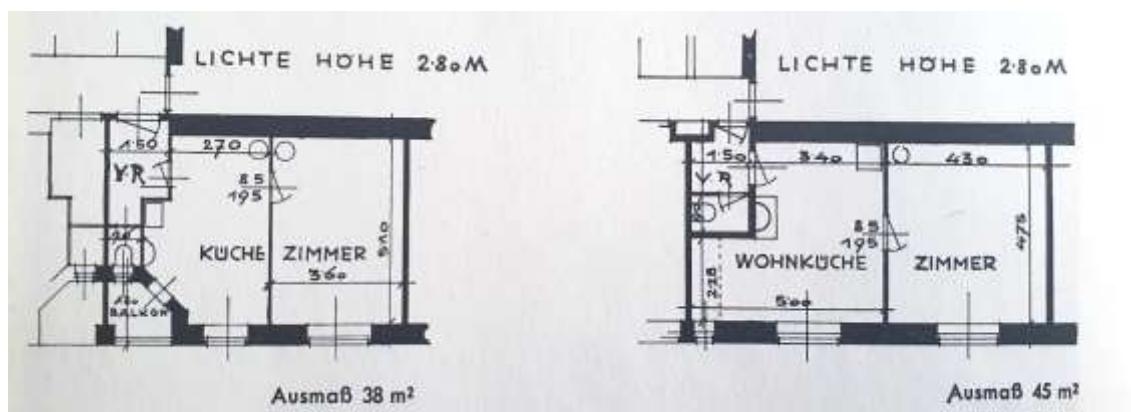


Figure 3 – A typical floorplan of smaller and larger 2-room apartment types built in the interwar period (Source: MARCHART, 1984: 30)

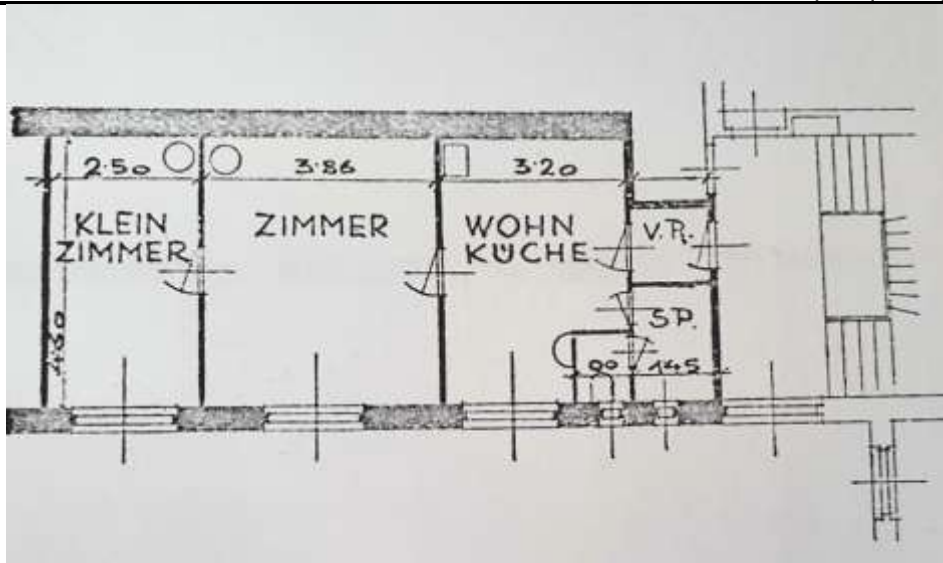


Figure 4 – A typical floorplan of 3-room apartment types built in the interwar period (Source: BLAU, 2014: 213).

From 1934 to 1945, during the Austrofascist and National Socialist period, municipal building activity came to a halt. However, in the postwar period, the municipality resumed its building activity in high intensity in response to housing shortage caused by war damages. The municipal housing estates constructed during this period are of low quality in terms of building materials and technologies. Apartments were comparatively small but planned with the intention of later connecting them to form larger units (STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2016: 65). In the 1950s, typical apartments had one to four rooms, with sizes ranging from 28 to 87 square meters. Most units were between 50 and 63 square meters and included a private bathroom (MARCHART, 1984: 83; BAUMANN, 2012: 75). In addition to replacing damaged buildings, the municipality began constructing large housing estates on the outskirts of the city. Between the end of World War II and the late 1960s, more than 100,000 units were built as part of the municipal housing program. From the 1970s onwards, the municipality reduced its building activity and began offering subsidies to LPHAs, which became increasingly prevalent in the construction of social housing (KADI, 2015; LITSCHAUER; FRIESENECKER, 2022; REINPRECHT, 2017). The municipal housing estates built during this period offer improved quality, with larger apartments to accommodate the typical household size of that era, as well as a greater variety of floor plan types (MARCHART, 1984: 85-88; STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2016: 67). In 2004, the municipality finally ceased its building activity, but since 2019, new municipal estates have been built on a small scale (STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2023a).

As a result of this development, about 30% of the municipal housing stock dates back to the period between 1923 and 1934, while approximately 50% of the housing units were built in the first two postwar decades. The remaining 20% are more recent (STADT WIEN – WIENER WOHNEN, 2023b). Although some buildings have been refurbished and some very small apartments have been converted into larger ones, the municipal housing stock still mainly consists of relatively small flats compared to the rest of Vienna's housing stock (Figure 5). With the exception of newer estates built after the

1970s, the floor plans generally consist of small rooms and layouts that require access to one room through another. Furthermore, there is often a noticeable distinction between living spaces and sleeping areas based on room size. This reflects the need to use space efficiently, as well as a specific “geography of intimacies” (BARBEY 1984: 97) in which one central room, the living room, is more public than the other ones. This is a typical feature of housing norms that revolve around the nuclear family, as noted by LÖFGREN (1990) and supports the idea that “the construction of council housing was conceptually tailored to the needs of the small ‘orderly’ family” (SIEDER, 1985: 45).

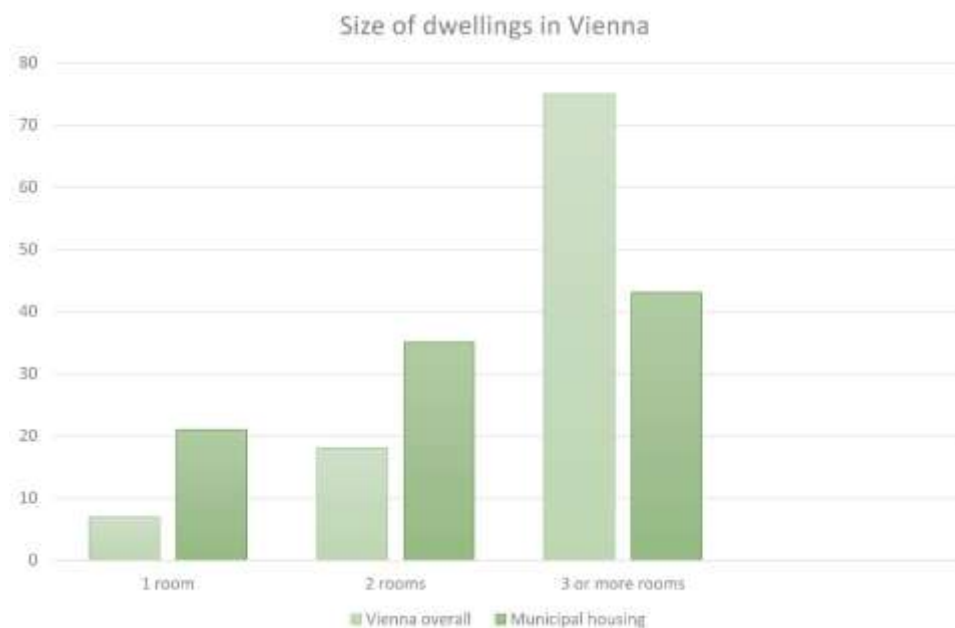


Figure 5 — Size of dwellings in Vienna overall and in municipal housing more specifically in percent. (Source: Wiener Wohnen and Statistik Austria).

To comprehend the present implications of these architectural structures, it is crucial to connect them to the allocation modes of the housing stock. Unlike housing systems in other cities, where public housing is reserved for those who cannot afford to acquire housing in the private market, municipal housing in Vienna follows a mixed-income approach. Income limits are as high as those for subsidized housing in general. However, there are other access criteria that apply to municipal housing as well as to a considerable part of the subsidized housing stock. Prospective tenants must possess the Austrian citizenship or an equivalent status, such as EU citizenship or a permanent residence permit. Additionally, applicants must have lived at the same address in Vienna for at least two years and they need to maintain a “clear-cut family status”, which means that spouses need to live together if they apply for municipal housing. For municipal housing, more specifically, officials additionally review whether there are any outstanding rent payments or termination procedures due to misconduct (STADT WIEN – SOCIAL HOUSING, 2023). Additionally, applicants must fit into a pre-defined category of “legitimate housing need”. This means that municipal housing addresses persons in particular life situations rather than prioritizing those with lower incomes. For example, this policy applies to couples living together, individuals under the age of 30 who are

leaving their parental home for the first time (referred to as “young Viennese”), households residing in overly cramped conditions, and individuals with specific personal needs due to age, illness or disability. In cases of very urgent needs, exceptions to some of the formal access requirements may apply, and another, personalized and individualized, system of allocation may be used.⁴ However, in most cases, the process is highly formalized. Overall, this access system has been found to promote conventional, stable lifestyles and to enforce a nuclear family structure (see also KUMNIG, 2018).

However, representatives of the housing institution stress the importance of responding to social and demographic changes. They note that in newly constructed apartments this happens through “flexible layouts” but acknowledge that this is much more difficult in existing dwellings (WI01). Additionally, access regulations are regularly under review. For instance, there have been modifications in the definition of “housing need” and the allocation process (WI02). Previously, eligible applicants had to wait for a housing assignment. However, in 2020, this system was replaced by the introduction of an online platform that allows prospective tenants to browse listings and select the apartment they wish to apply for. Similar systems are known as choice-based-letting in other countries (FLINT, 2004; KULLBERG, 2002). This is presented as a step towards a more tenant-friendly approach that allows applicants to find the apartment that truly suits their needs (WI01). Indeed, this is a significant change compared to the previous allocation method. Nevertheless, several factors limit choices, with the primary one being the number of available rooms. The general rule is one person per room, with the exception of “young Viennese” who are eligible for two rooms.⁵ The housing association presents this regulation as a means to offer high-quality and reasonably priced housing to as many people as possible: “The question is what is fair from a social point of view. How do you treat housing as a common good? (...) We aim to provide as many people as possible with good housing” (WI01). However, the following case studies illustrate how this rule, especially when combined with the architectural design of the older housing stock, can significantly restrict potential uses of a dwelling for certain types of households.

Challenged household types in municipal housing

As demonstrated in the previous section, the history of the municipal housing stock contains normative notions of household organization that are enforced through the access and allocation regulations. While some characteristics of the old housing stock, such as the large share of small apartments built in the 1920s and the post-war era, may align with recent developments like the growing number of single-person-households, other trends in household organization pose challenges to the existing system. To illustrate potential implications of the built environment and access regulation, two examples of household arrangements that encountered difficulties in the municipal housing system are presented based on our research on housing search.

Case study 1: sharing an apartment in younger age

The municipal housing system has a long-standing tradition of encouraging young people to apply for an apartment at the start of their independent housing career. Since 1997, “young Viennese” aged 17 to 30, who have lived with their parents for the previous ten years, may apply for a municipal apartment (APA-OTS 2005). The municipality offers them the possibility to obtain a two-room-apartment even if they live alone, considering the variability of perspectives for the future, such as relationships, marriage, or childbirth. This regulation addresses the housing needs of those who want to live alone or as a couple right after leaving the parental home. However, it does not support another common household arrangement for people of this age. In the German-speaking countries, home-sharing has become increasingly popular, especially among younger individuals, since the 1980s. This practice originated in the context of the 1968 movement, but has since lost much of its political background and has become a common practice not only for university students but also for other young adults (STEINFÜHRER; HAASE, 2009; BREUSS, 2012; REICHARDT, 2014: 351-360). Although the histories and the motifs for home-sharing among young adults vary in different national contexts, it has become an increasingly relevant option in other European housing systems as well (ARUNDEL; RONALD, 2015; BRICOLCOLI; SABATINELLI, 2016; MACKIE, 2016; RAMALHETE; GATO, 2015). For young Viennese adults aged 20 to 24 who have left their parental home, sharing a flat is the most common household arrangement. In 2022, 21.5% of individuals in this age group resided in a shared apartment, while 18.4% lived alone or as single parents and 11.2% lived with a partner. For those aged 25 to 29, the majority live with a partner (40,1%), followed by those living alone or with their children (30%). However, sharing a flat remains a relevant option, applying to 13,6% of adults in this age group (source: STATcube – Statistical Database of STATISTICS AUSTRIA).

In municipal housing, flat-sharing is not typically considered in administrative arrangements. For instance, there is no formal model of individual rental contracts with the municipal housing agency, unlike in the case of privately rented apartments that are often designated for student flat-sharing. Sharing a municipal apartment with non-family members is not impossible since non-family members may be allowed to live in the apartment if the person with the rental contract agrees, but it can be difficult due to the limitation in flat size which takes into consideration only family members (married or consensual partners, children, parents, and siblings). In practice, sharing a municipal flat can be complicated due to the layout of a considerable part of the housing stock, as is illustrated by the case of one of our youngest interviewees.

21-year-old Patrick⁶ shared his experience of facing difficulties while planning to share a municipal apartment with a (female) friend. Patrick grew up in a three-room municipal apartment in a housing estate built in the 1970s that included a living room and two bedrooms. As he began his university studies about two years before our interview, he started searching for a new apartment because sharing a room with his brother became increasingly inconvenient. Since a friend of his was in a similar situation, they decided to look for an apartment together, believing that “it would be cool to share one”. As both had a very limited budget, consisting of minor jobs, family allowances and a student grant, affordability was a key issue. As Patrick was familiar with municipal housing because he had been raised on a municipal estate, it seemed natural to concentrate on

this field of housing. A quick look at the private housing market confirmed their decision: “We searched online for a while for a privately rented apartment, but I soon realized that this wouldn’t work out financially. There is a huge price difference compared to municipal housing.”

Patrick qualified for municipal housing in the category of the “young Viennese”, which would have given him the choice between one or two rooms. Together, Patrick and his friend were only able to get the same two rooms he could have had on his own. This turned out to be problematic due to the floorplans of most municipal apartments of this size. “We tried to see if we could share a municipal apartment, but this was hardly possible because most of them don’t have two rooms that can be accessed independently,” Patrick explained. Even when they found an apartment with individual access to both rooms, they were still dissatisfied because one room, originally intended as a living room, was significantly larger than the other.

Reflecting on his housing search experience, Patrick is frustrated by the impression that the municipal housing system favors single or couple living and does not support his desired living arrangement of sharing a flat. This feeling is reinforced when he learns from the counselling service provided by the municipal housing agency that if he and his friend were a couple, they would have had the opportunity to obtain an additional room:

“You only get an apartment with a room or two [on your own, if you are a ‘young Viennese’]. If you have a partner, you can get two or three. And we wanted to share a flat, so we would have rather needed three: a living room and two bedrooms. But this was not possible because we are not in a relationship. We didn’t understand that. Because as a couple you can more easily share a bedroom than in our situation. We found that very unfair.”

In the end, Patrick received an offer to relocate to one of the newly constructed municipal estates next to the building where he lived with his family. Initially, he hoped to find a suitable apartment for himself and his friend:

“Well, my friend and I wanted to move in together, but in this building, again, there was no apartment with two rooms that could be accessed independently. We tried to figure out whether we could make it work for us somehow, but, no, it just doesn’t work out.”

Since all the available apartments had a kitchen-living room and a bedroom that could only be accessed through the other room, Patrick and his friend decided to give up their plan of sharing a flat and he chose an apartment for himself in the new building. He carefully weighed the pros and cons of a one-room and a two-room apartment and finally opted for the larger one because he believed this to be a good deal in the long run, stating, “You don’t find anything similar for that price. (...) When I tell friends about it, they are stunned that housing can be so cheap.” Nevertheless, he is worried whether he will be able to afford the flat in the next couple of years until he finally gets a full-time job. It should be noted that Patrick may not be representative of his age group. While his desired household arrangement is statistically relevant, there is also a significant portion of individuals in the age group of the “young Viennese” who live alone or with their partners. Some find themselves well addressed by the system, as is illustrated by another of our interviewees, 33-year-old Sarah, who left her parental home in her mid-

twenties and moved to a municipal apartment that her oldest sister had obtained as a “young Viennese”. She viewed this as an opportunity not to spend too much money on housing as a young person, even though she didn’t consider it as a permanent solution due to the apartment’s condition. However, other young adults in their twenties may not have access to the system because they don’t fulfil the general access criteria or because they have lived in various other household constellations before considering moving to a municipal apartment. During our research, we encountered several cases that did not meet the necessary qualifications. For instance, Sibel (25) and Aziz (26), to students from Turkey, were ineligible because they don’t have a permanent residence permit. Similarly, Pia (19) was unable to access municipal housing because she lives outside of Vienna. Piotr (28) and Lisa (29) left their parental home early. Having already lived alone, they no longer qualify as “young Viennese”. In the light of studies pointing to increasingly diversified pathways into adulthood which may involve repeated changes in housing arrangements, including repeatedly moving in and out of the parental home (e.g. ARUNDEL; RONALD, 2015), the concept of “young Viennese” that is applied in municipal housing probably fails to address a relevant number of young adults.

Apart from not generally being representative of his age group, Patrick’s specific demands for an appropriate shared apartment may not be applicable to all forms of home-sharing, as there are various motivations for sharing an apartment, ranging from living together with friends to the financial necessity of sharing costs (STEINFÜHRER and HAASE, 2009; ARUNDEL; RONALD, 2015; BRICOLCOLI and SABATINELLI, 2016). Consequently, also the demands for living spaces may vary. Young adults who want to live together more closely may require a larger kitchen or a living room to accommodate shared activities (HEATH, 2004), while others may be content with individual rooms for each member of the household (STEINFÜHRER; HAASE, 2009). Patrick’s case combines different aspects. He expressed interest in sharing an apartment with his friend (it “would be cool”), and they both agreed on their preference of having a living room. However, financial considerations are also a factor, so they would be willing to settle for two rooms as long as they provide adequate privacy for each individual. It is important to note, though, that Patrick’s notion that everybody needs a room with individual access is related to a specific, but common, concept of privacy and intimacy that has developed throughout Western housing history (HÄUSSERMANN and SIEBEL, 2000; LÖFGREN, 1990) and is not necessarily all-encompassing or unchangeable.

Despite its limitations, Patrick’s case points to a relevant issue that has been discussed for other European housing markets. In his introduction to a special issue on young people and housing in the *International Journal of Housing Policy*, Peter MACKIE (2016) addresses house sharing as an increasingly relevant strategy among young adults. He notes that “policy makers, landlords and housebuilders have been slow to respond to this growing phenomenon” and points to the need to provide housing that “more effectively meets the needs of young sharers” (MACKIE, 2016: 141). Patrick’s case shows that limitations may arise not only due from a lack of space for shared living, but that the challenges of the available building stock may be enhanced by access and allocation policies that are still closely tied to a household model based on the nuclear family.

Case study 2 – single parenting

Another group that has recently been added to the target groups of municipal housing are single parents, a category that makes up about 19,5% of families in Vienna (STATISTIK AUSTRIA, 2023: 262). In 2020, single parents were introduced as one of the recognized categories of housing need for municipal housing applications. As a result, single parents no longer have to live in overcrowded conditions to be eligible and there is also an exception to the rule of having lived in the same place for the last two years. However, single parents can only use their status in their application if they do not have a rental contract of their own and they must also accept the same restrictions on room availability that apply to other households. The introduction of the “housing ticket for single parents” was presented by representatives of the housing agency as one example of dynamically reacting to societal changes and demands (WI01). Indeed, one of the staff members responsible for dealing with special cases reported that the number of single parents appealing to the so-called Housing Commission, an institution that re-evaluates previously rejected cases, has significantly decreased (WI02). Nevertheless, some cases in our material point to potential difficulties for the target group of single parents. The formal requirements as well as the possibilities within the existing housing stock proved to be potential obstacles for some of our interviewees.

Svenja, a 37-year-old mother of two, decided to rent a small one-room apartment as a secondary residence when her relationship became difficult: “A place to retreat,” she calls it. When she and her partner finally separated a year later, she urgently needed another place to live for herself and her children because she did not want to continue sharing a household with her ex-partner and her own apartment was too small. However, she did not qualify for single parent status because she already had a lease. She recalls, “I went to the housing counseling service and the officer took all the details and then he told me that, yes, there is an obvious need, but the rental contract is a problem.”

In order to receive the so-called “housing ticket for single parents”, she would have either had to apply either while still living with her ex-partner or while living in another place, but without having a rental contract of her own. She was informed that she would have the opportunity to present her case to the Housing Commission and explain the reasons for her housing need. At the time of the interview, she had not taken any further steps in this direction. Instead, she was looking for an apartment on the private rental market, which was, however, difficult due to affordability issues.

As other studies have shown, Svenja is not an isolated case. Not having one’s own rental contract is a requirement that is difficult to fulfil, given that single parents can only apply for access to municipal housing after divorce, which can be a lengthy process and, depending on the situation, can create problematic dependencies (HEINDL, 2020; CARITAS, 2021). In practice, not moving into one’s own home, however suitable or unsuitable it may be, in order to fulfil the criteria for the housing ticket often does not correspond to the realities of separation. Cases in which single parents are threatened with eviction or have moved into some form of institutional care can be dealt with through the so-called “social allocation”, but in these cases there are very strict limits on the size of the dwelling, which makes many single parents reject this option (CARITAS, 2021: 23-25).

While Svenja's case illustrates a difficulty faced by single parent households due to access policies, other challenges are more related to the qualities of accessible housing. As in Patrick's case, the limitation of rooms in relation to the size of the household can be difficult to deal with. For single parents, as for everyone else, the rule is one room per person. While this rule seems comfortable when two adult partners share a bedroom, it can be problematic for single parents. Depending on the age of the child(ren) and how the family organizes the daily use of space in the home, this may be acceptable for some, while for others it may be a reason not to apply for municipal housing. For example, Sarah, a 34-year-old mother of one, explained, "I don't necessarily want to have a municipal apartment. The space one can get would not be enough for me and my daughter. One can get only two rooms, but I would like to have some space of my own."

Svenja, on the other hand, has set her personal minimum standard lower than the limitation that Sarah rejects. With her two children, ages 7 and 10, she would temporarily accept a two-room solution, but she expresses specific needs for the layout of the apartment, balancing housing needs and affordability:

"Well, I thought it should have at least two rooms, so that one can be the children's room. And ideally the kitchen should be an extra room. In case there are only two rooms. However, the most important thing is that it should be close to school. (...) And, of course, a balcony would be nice, but while searching I thought, okay, I have to make compromises and be a bit more flexible. After all, the apartment has to be affordable."

As in Patrick's case, the notion of privacy expressed by Sarah (having her own room) and partly also by Svenja (having a room separate from the kitchen, even if it would probably also serve as the family's living room) needs to be contextualized, but studies on the housing situation of single parents highlight that the lack of places to retreat due to inconvenient layouts or limited space is addressed as a common problem in single parent households (ZELLER et al., 2019: 24). Sarah's reflections are another example of the challenges that can be posed by the concept of legitimate space needs applied by the municipal housing agency, which is linked to a normative household structure associated with the nuclear family or couple relationships. While for some single parents, this limitation can be overcome by finding housing in another housing sector, recent studies on the housing situation of single parents in Vienna suggest that, for many, housing costs are a major burden, making it difficult to find a suitable solution in the private rental market or even in the general subsidized housing market (ZARTLER et al. 2019; HEINDL, 2020; CARITAS, 2021).

The issue raised by Sarah is not only relevant in the case of the older housing stock. In the recently built municipal estates, housing for single parents is an explicit concern. Amenities designed to meet the needs of children and families in the building and apartments that are presented as particularly suitable, are intended to support single parents: "The compact floor plan and optimally positioned bathrooms allow for flexible apartment use, for example, even when living conditions change" (LEITNER, 2023). While this concept addresses potential affordability problems by keeping apartments small, it has been criticized for not providing enough privacy for parents and children (WÖLFL, 2022; see also fig. 6). The tension between the two needs that are addressed in these discussions, individual privacy and affordability, is not easy to resolve (see also

HEINDL, 2020: 113f). From perspective of housing seekers, the results of other studies suggest that there is a considerable variation in the priorities that households set and how they balance housing needs and affordability issues. While many appear to temporarily accept the lack of a separate bedroom for parents in favor of other aspects such as affordability, the desire for a separate room is still expressed by most as a medium-term necessity. Moreover, the extent to which compromises are considered acceptable depends strongly on the number and age of children and it becomes clear that not only the number of rooms, but also the concrete layout of the apartment, especially regarding individual accessibility and separability of spaces is essential (ZELLER et al., 2019: 57-61; CARITAS, 2021: 37-39). Against this background, it seems that, while the general regulations of the municipal housing agency defining legitimate flat sizes may be suitable to meet the housing needs of some single-parent households, but may be highly problematic in other cases, also depending on the concrete layout of the apartments.



Figure 6 – According to WÖLFL (2022) more than half of the apartments in the estate Wolfganggasse which is especially dedicated to single parents have a floor plan like this.

Conclusion

By combining a material culture perspective with an analysis of policies of access and allocation, this paper has aimed to suggest useful ways of thinking about how municipal housing in Vienna deals with changing household arrangements. I have argued that municipal housing in Vienna is closely tied to normative views of the nuclear family as the primary household type. These norms are manifested, on the one hand, in the characteristics of the housing stock, much of which dates from the interwar and postwar periods and reflects the necessities and constraints as well as the household norms of that time. For example, there was an emphasis on the efficient use of space, resulting in small rooms, limited corridors, and a clear distinction between living room and bedrooms. On the other hand, the family norm is enforced through the allocation criteria by requiring a “clear-cut family status” and limiting the number of available rooms based on the assumption of a typical use as a family home (including a living room or kitchen-living room for family activities and a shared bedroom for the – usually two – adults in the household). This limitation is particularly important given the characteristics of the available housing stock, where independent access to rooms is often not possible.

Case studies of two relevant household types that deviate from the single or family household, namely young flat-sharers and single parents, illustrate the potential of thinking together the material characteristics of the housing stock, in particular the layout of the dwellings, and the allocation rules when trying to understand potential challenges. Some of the issues raised in the material presented relate mainly to the allocation and access policies, such as the criteria for being granted access to the municipal housing system as a single parent. Other aspects, such as the desire of single parents for rooms with individual access and a separate kitchen, are more related to the material quality of the housing stock. However, there are also cases where the combination of these two aspects is highly relevant. For example, restrictions on the size of dwellings, combined with the layout, may be an obstacle for young adults wishing to share a home or for single parents trying to provide privacy for all members of the household. While those with higher and middle incomes may find attractive options in other segments of the housing market, such as limited-profit housing, those who rely on the most affordable housing sector are often confronted with these normative settings.

The case studies presented are exploratory in nature and do not address a wide range of issues that would also be relevant to the topic at hand. First, there is likely to be considerable variation in the two groups presented, which I have tried to indicate by reference to other studies, but which is not covered in our own empirical material. Second, they don’t include all the relevant household arrangements that might be affected by a norm promoting the nuclear family model. Other cases in our material suggest that large households, individuals who share a home in adult life, or people who work at home may also find it difficult to obtain a suitable municipal apartment. Third, the focus on the size and layout of dwellings overlooks other aspects of the possible fit or mismatch between housing aspirations and the available housing stock, such as location, style and aesthetics, or ecological aspects (e.g. PREECE et al, 2019). Fourth, another relevant aspect that has not been discussed here due to the focus on housing search in the empirical material is how people cope with unmet housing aspirations, how they deal with inconvenient layouts in their everyday lives, how they develop spatial practices, and how they might reshape their own ideals and notions, for example



regarding privacy and intimacy. As other studies have shown, the intentions of the material design of housing do not necessarily determine its use, there is a diversity of modes of appropriation and also of home-making strategies in which temporary and partial solutions play an important role (see e.g. PREECE et al., 2021; ERANIL and GÜREL, 2022; PARUTIS, 2011). Deepening research in this direction could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how housing opportunities affect lifestyles.

As exemplary as they are, the cases presented suggest that it is a promising endeavor to bring housing studies and material culture studies closer together in future research. A material culture perspective helps to enrich housing studies by looking not only at housing provision in general, but also at the more complex social effects of access to housing with specific material characteristics. In this way, the proposed perspective can reveal implications of allocation mechanisms that may go beyond the intentions with which they were designed, and thus point to unintended mechanisms of exclusion. A housing studies perspective that looks at allocation policies and mechanisms, on the other hand, can enrich a material culture perspective by asking not only in which way durable structures of the built environment become relevant, but also for whom. It allows us to ask who has opportunities to find a dwelling that corresponds to preferred household arrangements and lifestyles, and for whom these opportunities are limited by economic aspects as well as by housing policies.

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¹ Definitions of social housing vary depending on the local context. For the present paper, I propose to stick to the rather general definition by Blackwell and Bengtsson (2023: 270) according

to which social housing is 'rental housing that is operated on the basis of meeting housing need and not primarily in order to make profit for the landlord'.

² The notions of limited-profit housing and subsidized housing are used interchangeably in this paper because limited-profit housing associations are the main receiver of building subsidies and, therefore, these areas largely overlap. Nevertheless, it is important to note that limited-profit housing is regulated by the limited profit housing act, which is a national law, and the allocation of housing subsidies, on the other hand, is regulated by a federal law.

³ Equity contributions are a sum of money that is paid by tenants moving into the apartment and is returned to them when leaving.

⁴ The main forms to be mentioned in this context are the social allocation and the possibility of appealing to the Housing Commission. Social allocation tackles cases of urgency, particularly homeless persons, persons at risk of being evicted or persons living in institutional care. Cases are individually assessed, and flats are allocated more rapidly, but without options of choice and usually with lower standards regarding space and quality of the dwelling. The Housing Commission, on the other hand, is an institution to which persons can appeal after having received a negative response in the standard application process. It offers the possibility of considering special situations of need that are not included in the catalogue of acknowledged needs and can also make exceptions regarding the general access criteria.

⁵ Although in the English-speaking countries apartment sizes are usually defined in terms of the number of bedrooms, I stick to the municipal housing agency's definition here, which includes all living spaces, but not (small) kitchens, bathrooms, toilets, or corridors. In this sense, an apartment with a kitchen, a separate living room and two bedrooms is considered a three-room apartment, an apartment with a combined kitchen and living room and one bedroom as a two-room apartment.

⁶ All names are pseudonyms.