

Introduction: The Vienna Model of Housing Provision in Times of Austerity

Public & Social Housing in General Social and public housing once qualified as a means of intervening in society in order to achieve the equal distribution of ever expanding wealth in Europe. Municipal housing, as well as state owned industry, restrictive regulations such as taxation on luxury and speculation and the stimulus of subsidies was the legitimate and broadly accepted tools by which to implement a social liberalist society. Today, however, all these governmental tools and actions seem to be tired out and no longer accepted by a broader popular discourse.

The labour class, which was at the core of the social democratic discourse on public housing, seems to have disappeared: dissolved into what are today called target groups:

young families, senior citizens, single households, carless collectives, etc

In recent years, underpinned by the liberal discourse of Western industrial nations and in parallel with the advancements of the so-called financial capitalism (Marazzi 2010) that has led to the current financial crises, it has appeared that there is no acute housing shortage and no misery, and thus no need for public housing or subsidies any longer.

With this development the individual subject was made to believe that they had sole responsibility for their good or bad »luck«. The state and municipalities could easily and without resistance outsource the housing question – that is to build affordable housing for all – and get rid of real estate in order to implement a lean administration and fill the supposedly empty city treasury.

In many European cities a traditional renters-market was and still is gradually being transformed into an exclusive owners-market. The pragmatic social-democratic attitude of reforming society towards a distributed wealth – which has, from the beginning, been strongly associated with the production of housing – has been replaced by a generally accepted impetus towards (reduced state intervention) *less state* and a wide-reaching *austerity policy*.

Friedrich Engels' position in his seminal text *The Housing Question* (1872) seems bereft of any basis; in particular, the argument that: »only by the solution of the social question, that is, by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, is the solution of the housing question made possible.« (Engels 1872)

Since the 1960s the capitalist mode of production has expanded radically into society at large (Tronti 1974), including into what Marx had called the Non-Labour. The labour class has disintegrated since this time; its particularized contemporaries are no longer represented within the general discourse. This has led to a situation in which the social question has been excluded, as if it has already been solved by individualization and particularization. Thus the current situation has presented itself as if there is, on the one hand, no need to reform and actualize the current liberalized systems of housing provision towards more common wealth. On the other hand, the current situation has created status setting in which it is utterly unacceptable to speak about revolutionary policy. Still I believe that exactly this idea of a possible revolutionary politics is necessary in order to not succumb to the liberal promise that we are all liable for our own luck.

The Research

Our local research project *Modelling Vienna* as part of a larger research consortium comprising a team at the University of Westminster, a team from the School of Architecture in Oslo, and colleagues from Iceland – sets out to research the specific practice of the Vienna model of public housing provision. The research in Vienna will be conducted in two phases.

The first part is an endeavor to analyze the current model of public housing provision, understanding the domain of housing as a field that is crossed by many different professions and disciplines.

The research so far includes: the missing history of Red Vienna's post World War II legacy, interviews with experts in Vienna, analysis of the discourse that occurs in and around the model of housing provision, and reviews of cases (concrete objects of the currently themed housing production, from the »car-free settlement« to »young and affordable housing« to »young architects«). In the second (future) phase the research aims to develop alternative scenarios for a future model of housing provision, beyond the simple binary of liberalism versus socialism, engaging in the current state of *austerity measures* ...

Vienna Model of Social Housing Provision

Somehow the city of Vienna managed to keep its stock of Gemeindebauten that the municipality had built since the early 1920s; additionally, in the 1990s it was able to re-range the production of public and social housing in a specific way: it liberalized the system of social housing provision, securing its leading position within the Vienna market. Thus the municipality is still the *main* player setting the criteria for the production controlling about 50% of the housing stock in Vienna.

It thus has a huge influence on the private market of real estate and through this, one can argue, has established a kind of alternative economy in the city of Vienna.

Only slowly are we able to identify the limits of the system of social housing provision and its alternative economy beyond an obvious critique of the anachronistic and unbearable attitude of

the centralistic model of governance that is in place in Vienna.

And we start to understand how the overall highly successful model of housing provision is coming under scrutiny and being diluted by its actors (be it architects, be it developers, be it politicians) unable to step outside the binary of liberalism versus socialism.

With the global financial crisis and an ever more dominant dictum of austerity policy, even the City of

Vienna aims to consolidate its treasury and proposes supposedly »innovative« ways of solving the problem of affordable housing production with the introduction of the so-called *Wohnbauinitiative*. The city hands out public money to so called *private partners* building large housing projects. In return these new consortia of financial service providers and building contractors are bound to a specific maximum rent for the next 10 years. At the same time, bottom-up initiatives promoting Co-Housing have recently sprung up making themselves visible within the city's discourse ...

In this issue of *dérive* we are able to present some of the findings of our research so far. Starting with a genealogy of publicly funded housing since the end of the World War II, the text investigates the alteration of a formerly ideologically coined politics towards a liberalized system of an integrated housing market in which Vienna's municipality directly and indirectly controls about the half of housing real estate in the Austrian private investment are blurry. The subsequent text presents parts of a wider analysis of the discourse in and around the Vienna model of housing provision, discussing the aspiration of the city of Vienna to address a multitude of possible »consumers«.

A third text reports on a series of (anonymous) interviews conducted by the research team last winter. The interviewees speak about their personal prospects and challenges in the Vienna housing provision. Finally, the concluding text tries to frame the current situation by looking at the *Superblock turned Überstadt*. The text aims to address the specific Viennese situation and its innovative efforts.

All the texts in this issue of *dérive* are written in English and accompanied by only a short abstract in German. This is exceptional for *dérive*. After a long discussion the editorial team and the authors decided to publish in English in order to make this very special situation – the alternative economy in Vienna beyond the mythic »Red Vienna« – accessible to a broader international community. Thus the issue also contains a glossary in which we have tried to translate specific concepts of the Vienna discourse into English.

The Vienna research team includes Andreas Rumpfhuber, Michael Klein, Georg Kolmayr, Teresa Klestorfer, and Lisa Ehrenstrasser (until 09/2011). The project is funded by the HERA Joint Research Program (heranet.info): SCIBE – Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment (www.scibe.eu). It is hosted by the Institute of Design Assessment and the Multidisciplinary Design Group at TU Vienna. We are grateful to Professor Ina Wagner who facilitated our research proposal.

1) The City owns 27% of the housing stock in Vienna (Public Housing, Gemeindebauten). A further 21% of the housing stock is owned (and controlled) by limited profit housing developers; they are socially bound, and through the subsidies and the quality measures indirectly controlled by the municipality.

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