Single-family housing – a fading dream?

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Findings from a helicopter perspective

- Home ownership is one of the main causes of excessive resource consumption and urban sprawl
- Detached homes are still the preferred type of housing provision across Europe, even among the post-Covid generation
- In Austria, for example, we face the challenge that young households consider home ownership to be an unrealistic option. As a result, they rent, reduce their working hours and prefer a hedonistic lifestyle
- We need to handle conflicting objectives

Urban sprawl as a threat scenario?

Source: ORF

Disadvantages of conventional single family homes

- Land consumption: Loss of agricultural land, landscape, CO2 sinks, water retention, biodiversity, etc.
- Urban sprawl / fraying settlement edges
- Very large ecological footprint in construction and during operation
- High costs for municipalities for technical infrastructure
- Induced private transport
  (low density does not allow for adequate public transport)

But owning your own home also has advantages!

- Preferred tenancy for the majority of population
- Activation of private capital (including sweat equity)
- Very high regional added value
- Strong motivation for individuals to economically perform
- Attachment to one's homeland, avoidance of migration
- Stabilisation of rural regions
- Comparatively low subsidy costs

Conclusions

- If home ownership is the preferred type of housing (even for young households), we cannot ignore this
- Being able to afford your own house at some point is a kind of societal promise with an enormous impact on the mindset of young people and their motivation to perform
- The single-family home has great political and economic potential: fulfilling dreams of home ownership, demographic stabilisation, activation of private capital, very strong regional value chains, etc.
- At the same time, the massive negative impact of single homes in regional development must be neutralised

Resolution of most conflicting objectives is possible

Positive historic examples

Garden city Puchenau near Linz (AT), 1960s-1990s

Source: Docomomo.at

Freiburg Vauban (DE), 2000s-2010s

Source: IIBW

Key points of the new single-family home scheme

1) Much smaller plot sizes than usual
2) Incentives for moderate building sizes
3) Within existing settlement boundaries

Neighbourhood / plot size

- A neighourhood with parceled building plots is to be implemented
- Approx. 250 m² per plot
- Internal development with residential streets (cul-de-sacs) with hardly any car traffic
- Similar to high-density low-rise buildings, but divided into plots instead of condominiums (full ownership instead of condominium ownership)
- High-quality communal open spaces
- Quality of life for all age groups

Diversity of individual houses

- Mandatory development plan (more detailed than land use plan) specifies basic design rules, but otherwise allows for quite a lot of freedom
- Building development at the property boundary, attached to one or both adjacent properties
- Diversity of design: architect-designed houses, builder-designed houses with owner contribution, prefabricated houses, Tiny Houses, etc.
- Incentives for moderate building size, e.g. 120m² usable floorspace
- >150m² garden remains (individual) + liveable residential street (communal)

ACE Conference on affordable Housing, 13 November 2025

Community-oriented technical solutions

- Residential street without car parking, reserved for children and those staying at home
- Nature-based design of semi-public areas
- Collective parking garage at the edge of the neighbourhood
- Heating and cooling via communal deep boreholes and a low-temperature network extending to the property boundary (temperature rise in individual buildings through individual heat pumps)
- It would also be conceivable to prepare a floor slab on each plot for the building to be constructed individually (particularly in difficult topography)
- All collective technical facilities will timely be transferred to the joint ownership of the residents (// energy community)

Affordability

- Cost efficiency through small plot size and moderate building size
- Cost efficiency through individuality in implementation
- Possibly land lease model (e.g. 1% of market value p.a. with a right to acquire full ownership whenever desired)
- Cost-effective parking through collective garage
- Subsidies, financing model

Economy of development

- Land costs below market level are crucial to success
- Significant commitment from the plot developer (public, housing fund, collective, commercial)
- It only works with a low margin for the plot developer
- Quick exit for the plot developer

What is required by public authorities?

- Appropriate zoning, land use plan and development plan
- Customary public utilities
- If applicable, discounted cost of building land
- If applicable, allocation scheme for individual land plots
- If available, individual housing subsidies

Benefits

For the future resident:

- Extensive autonomy
- Affordability
- Community building
- Life cycle orientation
- Sustainability

For the public:

- Appropriate density (not only for efficient land use, but also for high quality public transport)
- Affordability
- Preferential treatment of local people through allocation schemes that favour them (point system with high weighting for long-term residency)
- Stable sustainable communities
- Organic development of existing municipalities
- Moderate public subisies

What are the advantages of this concept?

- Extensive autonomy for individual owners
- Nevertheless, appropriate density
- Affordability
- Organic development of communities

Who is IIBW

- Private research and consultancy company, based in Vienna/Austria
- Established in 2000
- >400 research and consultancy projects in social/affordable housing, housing finance, housing legislation, housing and energy poverty, elderly housing, regional development and land management in Austria and international

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