

## 1 KITCHEN, 1 HOUSE, 1 NEIGHBORHOOD

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The Austrian pavilion at the Biennale Architettura in Venice 2025, that I curated together with Michael Obrist and Lorenzo Romito, focused the topic of the housing crisis. The situation in almost every European city and more or less worldwide is crucial. We cannot afford to live in our cities anymore. Cities are gentrified, housing has become an object of speculation, every day costs are higher than ever, and unemployment, isolation, loneliness and poverty is determining our lives. And all this together with increasing rents? In many European cities, employees spend more than half of their income on housing, while luxury apartments are built or cities are sold out to tourists. So what can we as architects do? In the pavilion the „AGENCY FOR BETTER LIVING“ showed two cities offering two possible solutions in dealing with this housing crisis: Vienna (the top down-model with affordable, rentable housing organized by the city) and Rome (the bottom-up-model with self organized housing in occupied buildings).

So how is Vienna doing this since more than hundred years? For over a century, Vienna's municipal authorities have been acquiring land and distributing affordable housing right across the city. Vienna City Council is Europe's largest property manager: 220,000 municipal apartments for 500,000 people with open-ended tenancy agreements. In addition to these, there are 200,000 further subsidized apartments. After shrinking for decades, Vienna is growing again and now has 500,000 more inhabitants than in 1989. Yet rents are still affordable. Since the 1920s Vienna is buying land to develop social housing projects, and the city is doing this until today. The so called Superblocks of the 1920s became the role-model for a living added with a whole series of functions beyond living. Buildings like the Karl-Marx-Hof (Karl Ehn, 1930) offered a central laundry, baths, sports facilities, a kindergarten, theatre spaces, grocery shops, a library and even more. So if we think about affordability, we should question ourselves: What do we mean with affordability? And what do we put in account? Can we share rooms, functions, abilities? How could we count this?

### 1 KITCHEN

In 1998, Vienna adopts comprehensive gender planning. The city has long openly discussed such matters as sexuality, gender identity, and living concepts that go beyond the traditional family. The most radical experiment in that case goes back to the 1920s, the 1- Kitchenhouse Heimhof, initiated by Auguste Fickert 1911 and built from 1921 to 1926 in the 15th district in Vienna. 246 kitchenless, small apartments shared one central kitchen, where women again were cooking, but now being payed. The Heimhof liberated women from housework,. Through that they gained time for leisure and productive work. The women housing project ro\*sa Donaustadt by Köb&Pollak Architecture (2009) refers to the 1- Kitchenhouse. It was developed together with women, offering 40 apartments for women of all ages and a whole series of shared spaces. In that case private kitchen were wished. But all apartments are built without a traditional living room, to be compensated by a series of common spaces like a central living room, a library, a workshop, a sauna and a central laundry, positioned in the best place of the building, connected to the roof terrace. The core of the project is a good lightened central, extra-wide corridor for multifunctional use and extension of the living spaces.

*Thesis #1: If you remove one room in each apartment you win multiple common spaces.*

### 1 HOUSE

In the 1970s Vienna shrinks, but still builds subsidized housing. One of the few Viennese megastructures, the Wohnpark Alterlaa in the south of Vienna (Harry Glück, K. Hlawenicka, Requat&Reinhaller, 1973-85), with its 3,200 apartments and iconographic rooftop swimming pools, worked quite well from the beginning on. While in other cities such big structures became problematic, in Vienna it is the most beloved place to live until today. The terraced buildings produce beautiful apartments on the facades with a lot of green, but problematic areas in the „big belly“ of the structure with poorly-lit spaces. These spaces have been offered to the inhabitants, and are now used extensively by more than 30 different clubs, like a Freddy Quinn Fan-Club, a Tango club, a pottery club, a fitness club and more.

*Thesis #2: If you build extra space, it will be used. Extra space can be rough and bad lightened, but should be flexible.*

## 1 NEIGHBORHOOD

2022 Vienna was site of an IBA, an international building exhibition. Whenever this happens in a city, changes are taking place. In developing this building exhibition, the city started to focus on neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are an evolution of the Superblock, but now spread into single building plots with differentiated architectures and programs. They are less heroic and smaller scaled but have a similar amount of collective space, although this is now shared across several buildings. So called neighborhood-houses are new typologies, where each of them has to include one common program, that can be shared by all inhabitants of the neighborhood.

*Thesis #3: Not every house needs to contain everything. Common space can be spread over the neighborhood.*

So, finally, five advices to start a good working strategy for affordable and quality housing for all:

1. Tax the rich.
2. Buy land (as a city).
3. Create neighborhoods instead of houses.
4. Skip single private rooms to gain common space.
5. Pay good for every care work.