

## SOCIAL HOUSING IN VIENNA AS A POSSIBLE DIRECTION OF CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR IN POLAND

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**Introduction:** In recent years, a weak interest in this segment a of the property market has been noticeable among social housing providers. The demand from practice and the existing gap in the Polish literature create a wide field for scientific research of a cognitive and applied nature. Considerations and research in the field of investing in social housing are justified, among others, by the fact that the validity of investing in the social housing market has already been confirmed in highly developed countries, for example in Austria. In Poland, however, this segment is still in the growth phase. Therefore, the potential of the housing and financial markets has not been fully exploited yet. A review of foreign experiences in creating a housing offer for social housing, as well as a detailed analysis of model and innovative solutions, will allow the identification of key success factors for this type of investment project.

**Aim of the paper:** The aim of the work is to present the Viennese model of social construction and housing, its role in the functional and spatial structure of the city, the administrative and organizational environment, and to assess the housing conditions and quality of life that this model offers.

**Materials and methods:** The article uses a structured literature review of social housing, including those from publications of the Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Wien. The study has an overview character.

**Results and conclusions:** The city of Vienna, as a model example of social housing with specific conditions that are difficult to find in other cities and being a city-land that can create its own tax policy, which largely financed social housing, has created a unique ability to meet housing needs through appropriate activities of organizational and administrative structures. and units responsible for construction and social housing management. The Vienna model is not fully adaptable to Polish conditions, due to differences resulting from administrative, legal and financial regulations, as well as a different model of approach to social housing in Austria and Poland (in Austria it is addressed to every citizen, in Poland only to the people).

**Keywords:** social housing, Vienna social housing market, local housing market, housing demand.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## Introduction

Social and municipal housing<sup>1</sup> is still an insufficiently researched segment of the real estate market in Poland. Unlike developed Western countries, this segment in Poland is characterized by little diversity in the available forms of residence. In recent years, there has been little interest in this segment among real estate investors. The demand from practice and the existing gap in the Polish literature create a wide field for scientific research of a cognitive and applied nature.

Considerations and research in the field of investing in social housing are justified, among others, by the fact that the validity of investing in the social housing market has already been confirmed in highly developed countries, for example in Austria. In Poland, however, this segment is still in the growth phase. Therefore, the potential of the housing and financial markets has not been fully exploited yet. A review of experiences from other European countries in creating a housing offer for social housing, examples of positive and negative phenomena as well as the history of the development of social housing in their area over the years after World War II based on literature research, as well as a detailed analysis of model and innovative solutions, will allow the identification of key success factors for this type of investment projects. It should be remembered that each country must find its own way of solving the housing issue in this segment, as its conditions are strongly correlated with a given culture, economic situation, size and age of the existing housing resources, as well as the directions resulting from the state's housing policy and implementation of its own tasks by the basic unit of local government - the commune.

The aim of the work is to present the Viennese model of social construction and housing, its role in the functional and spatial structure of the city, the administrative and organizational environment, and to assess the housing conditions and quality of life that this model offers.

In the face of the growing importance of social housing in the debate on housing in Poland, presenting the strengths and weaknesses of social housing in Vienna may help to avoid potential mistakes in the implementation of this type of housing in Polish cities. The essence of this segment of construction and maintaining its high level is subject to the guarantee of housing security for people in worse circumstances by maintaining low rental prices. In Poland, the share of such construction is still very low (Muzioł-Węclawowicz, 2018), which prevents city and municipal authorities from influencing rental prices and, consequently, the quality and cost of living of residents.

Presenting the development of social housing in Vienna over the years and its origins will highlight the various concepts of city development and social housing that dominated at a given time and will show which of these models is the most effective.

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<sup>1</sup> In Poland, this type of housing constitutes the housing stock of a commune and may be intended for residents registered in this commune, however: social - for people with low income; municipal – for various social groups.

## Investigating changes in preferences in the local housing market. Methodological assumptions

An important stage in the preparation of the article was desk research, primarily literature, which concerned the conditions of Viennese social housing. The method of field research on the inventory of selected housing units of social housing was also used to prepare the material. The inventory consisted of locating services, transport hubs and public spaces in the selected area and within a distance of 200 meters from the housing units. To supplement the field inventory, data from the city's geographic information system: *The City of Vienna Geographical Information System (ViennaGIS; <https://www.wien.gv.at/stadtplan/>)*, were used and processed.

The time scope of the work is October 1, 2023 to July 31, 2024, while the spatial scope includes the city of Vienna. Based on data from the Austrian Statistical Office from 2024, the city of Vienna had a population of 2,006,134 people, which makes it the fifth largest city in the European Union. Its area is 414.82 km<sup>2</sup>. According to a study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Vienna was named the best city in the world in 2024 for the third time in a row. The choice of Vienna as the object of research is due to its great achievements in the field of social housing (hence the mention of the "Vienna model" - Giecewicz, 2008; Hardy, 1934; Förster, Menking, 2024).

The research on social housing in Vienna used data from the *Wiener Wohnen* organization's database regarding the number of social housings in given districts. For the data obtained, the density rate per 1000 inhabitants was calculated for each district (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Number of social housings in Vienna in relation to the number of inhabitants (as at the end of 2023)*

District name	Number of social housing units	Number of social housing units per 1000 inhabitants
Innere Stadt	320	19,25
Leopoldstadt	10.759	99,37
Landstrasse	9.372	96,86
Wieden	1.758	52,27
Margareten	5.923	107,66
Mariahilf	1.558	49,58
Neubau	555	17,57
Josefstadt	536	21,72
Alsergrund	1.943	46,04
Favoriten	28.322	129,67
Simmering	16.079	147,46
Meidling	14.159	141,19
Hietzing	4.548	81,85
Penzing	9.253	95,56
Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus	7.302	95,94
Ottakring	10.133	98,91
Hernals	4.309	76,90
Währing	2.997	58,13
Döbling	10.093	133,65

Cont. table 1.

Brigittenau	12.653	147,66
Floridsdorf	25.614	139,28
Donaustadt	21.056	99,01
Liesing	12.095	102,60
<b>Vienna</b>	<b>211.005</b>	<b>106,46</b>

Source: own study based on data from Wiener Wohnen and Statistika (2024).

Based on calculations, it can be concluded that on average in Vienna there are 106.46 social apartments per 1000 inhabitants. The largest number of this type of premises is in the Brigittenau and Simmering districts - over 147.

## The concept and features of social housing

An important element in defining the term social housing is presenting the meaning of the term public housing.

The UNECE (2015) document on social housing indicates that in many countries, including Poland, Austria and the Netherlands, there is no official definition of social housing, and in countries such as Estonia, Norway or Germany there is no definition of this type of housing, and in France, no definition was unanimously adopted. The CECODHAS-Housing Europe (2010) document emphasizes that it is difficult to provide a clear official definition of social housing due to the existence of many different forms of "off-market" housing.

In the English-language literature, the term Social Housing is presented, for example, in the publication by Donner (2000). However, researchers emphasize that there is no single definition based on which its features can be indicated, including the below-market rent (Scanlon, Whitehead, 2014). Definitions may, however, vary depending on the country in which social housing is located and refer to the ownership of such housing (usually non-profit organizations and local governments - for example the Netherlands or Sweden) or who built such housing (for example Austria and France), or whether the rent is below the market price (Ireland and England), or what is the source of financing and the purpose of the apartments (Scanlon, Whitehead, 2014). According to the definition presented by Donner (2000), social housing includes housing financed from public funds as well as housing with moderate profit. In some cases, a segment of private rental housing may also be considered social housing, provided that public intervention reduces rents or keeps them below market rents. Therefore, social housing should meet the following conditions: financial outlays should include a limited profit or be partially covered by public or private funds, the price for rent or ownership apartment should be below the market level and their subsidization should have a positive impact on the availability of housing for people with low income (Donner, 2000).

An important issue that should be emphasized is the fact that both public and private developers can make a profit in both market-based and social housing (Housing Finance, 1998).

In Vienna, social housing is divided into two subgroups: social housing run by the city (German: *Gemeindebau*) and social housing run by non-profit organizations (Kadi, 2022). Both of these subgroups correspond to the criterion of social housing proposed by H. Ruonavaara (2017), who defined social housing as housing that is not only driven by demand and supply, but is determined by rigidly adopted rules, favoring applicants due to urgent housing needs and striving to provide housing at a price lower than the market price.

In the case of the concept of *Gemeindebau*, which is an Austrian-German concept literally translated meaning construction/community building, it usually refers to buildings constructed by a municipality in Austria, especially in Vienna, to provide municipal housing (Kuhnert, 2017).

The Viennese or, more broadly, Austrian, model of providing social housing is characterized by a close link between housing subsidies and the activities of non-profit construction organizations (also referred to as non-profit developers), whose activities are subject to the Act on non-profit organizations engaged in housing construction<sup>2</sup>. Organizations of this type are responsible for approximately 200,000 additional social housing in Vienna, receiving tax benefits in the field of corporate income tax, commercial tax, real estate tax, property transfer tax in the framework of non-profit housing and are privileged recipients of housing subsidies. Under the Act on Non-Profit Housing Organizations<sup>3</sup>, these organizations must provide favorable rental prices even after the expiry of housing subsidy obligations (Kuhnert, 2017; Ludwig, 2017). According to Schipper's (2018) definition, such organizations must ensure that they operate in a non-profit-making manner by providing housing to households that are below certain limits.

Another important definition is the concept of subsidized housing, which is presented in the Vienna Act on the promotion of housing construction and renovation of residential buildings<sup>4</sup>. According to this act, subsidized housing is housing in which the loan from the federal state (German: *Bundesland*) has not been written off or repaid in full, subsidies for it have not been suspended, and 40 years have not passed since the granting of the non-repayable contribution or 20 years have passed since the granting of the subsidy. for construction or until they have been fully repaid. Subsidies within the meaning of this Act may take the form of granting promotional loans from the Land (federal state of Austria), granting construction costs, rent and interest subsidies, granting non-repayable contributions or granting substitute loans.

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<sup>2</sup> Bundesgesetz vom 8. März 1979 über die Gemeinnützigkeit im Wohnungswesen (Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz – WGG)

<sup>3</sup> Bundesgesetz vom 8. März 1979 über die Gemeinnützigkeit im Wohnungswesen (Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz – WGG)

<sup>4</sup> Gesetz über die Förderung des Wohnungsneubaus und der Wohnhaussanierung und die Gewährung von Wohnbeihilfe (Wiener Wohnbauförderungs- und Wohnhaussanierungsgesetz – WWFSG 1989)

According to Cesarski (2013), it is housing that operates within the framework of housing policy, usually covering the sector subsidized (supported) by the state, local government or other public finance sector. Its main features include, among others, the dominance of rental apartments (rents with a lower value than market prices) and the possibility of establishing preferences in the area of availability of apartments for less affluent households or households at risk of exclusion (Przymeński, 2021). The function of such housing is to provide lower standards housing for poor people (Rataj, 2017).

In the model of the socio-liberal economic system in force in Poland, there are two opposing models of the state's housing economy - universal and selective. In the universal model, the state should create opportunities to rent social housing without introducing access criteria based on income, and such housing should be built with the support of public funds and rented at affordable prices, without profit for the owners (Lis, 2018). The selective model, which was implemented in Poland in a broad version until 2016, consisted in providing support from public funds to a selected group of people, for example, based on specific criteria or general social interest - young families, or finally people with higher incomes who have creditworthiness. In the selective model, narrow support was provided to a smaller group of people - with low or very low income and people at risk of social exclusion (Lis, 2018). Examples of the application of the narrow selective model are countries such as the Netherlands and England (Scanlon, Whitehead 2014). According to Lis (2018), the selective model is preferred by European Union institutions, including: the European Commission, which seeks to impose it on the EU countries.

According to Przymeński (2021), the function of social housing is to create conditions for housing demarginalization of people who are unable to provide it for themselves with their own resources, including homeless people able to function independently, and the instrument responsible for this is renting apartments on social conditions. In this definition it is also pointed out that this type of housing creates social, economic, architectural and urban phenomena and problems.

Social housing, according to Polish terminology, is mostly considered to be the social housing sector, which differs from the rest of the sector in terms of lower rents, replacement value of apartments and lower standard. The costs of social rent are partially covered by the commune's budget, which subsidizes the amount of social rent set at half of the lowest rent in municipal resources up to the full rental price (Article 23, consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 725). The non-social social housing sector includes, among others, apartments made available to residents with the ability to rent, for an indefinite period of time, covering the entire rental cost. Another example of social housing was (until 2021 - Journal of Laws 2021, item 11) the TBS system (Communal Building Society), which requires participation in the costs of housing construction. It was replaced in 2021 by the SIM system (Social Housing Initiative).

Since the introduction of changes to the Act on the Protection of Tenants' Rights of April 21, 2019, Polish law applies social rent to households with very low income, and indefinite-term lease to people whose wealth can be described as low. In the case of both of these forms of lease, the rent must be lower than market prices and may be additionally reduced if the household income is lower than the level specified in the municipal resolution (Article 7.1, consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2023, item 725).

To sum up, it should be stated that it is not possible to establish a unanimous international definition of social housing, which results from the diversity of housing markets in specific countries and historical, cultural and political circumstances (UNECE, 2015).

## **Social housing in the context of city development**

The oldest example of construction that can be described as social housing, existing to this day, is the *Fuggerei* estate in Augsburg, Germany, founded in 1521 and funded by J. Fugger, a merchant and banker. The walled estate was and is an enclave with its own streets, squares and church, which allowed residents to work in their place of residence (Giovanazzi, 2023; Zadworny, 2019). Another example of a housing estate intended for the poorest inhabitants was the *Hopital-General* housing estate in Geneva, which differed from *Fuggerei* in that it accepted all people in need (*Fuggerei* only Catholics) (Kingdon, 1971).

Modern social housing comes from the times of the industrial revolution, when in England, after media reports about terrible living conditions in workers' estates and diseases developing there, philanthropists and factory owners began to build tenement houses and housing estates for their employees, such as *Saltaire* from 1853 and *Port Sunlight* of 1888 (Rowan, 2003). These housing estates were designed under the influence of the then new concepts of city development.

The world's first large-scale housing project was an estate built on the site of the former *Old Nichol* slum (London, UK). The estate's design included 1069 two- and three-room apartments with a communal laundry, shops and 77 workshops, intended to become a place of residence for the working class (Greater London Council, 1975; Baker, 1998).

After World War II there was an increase in the active role of governments in the sphere of housing had a significant impact on the development of social housing in Western European countries after World War II. This period in Europe can be divided into three phases, which are described separately for each country in this paper (Scanlon, Whitehead, 2014):

- "reconstruction" (1946-1960), which was intended to reduce the effects of losses and shortages in housing caused by World War II - mainly mass construction,
- the "rise of diversity" (1960-1975), during which the main focus was on housing quality and urban revitalization, and divergences began to emerge in how governments

responded to housing policies related to the economic prosperity of the 1960s and the elimination of the housing shortage associated with World War II, at that time, apart from social housing, issues of housing ownership were important in political programs,

- the "new housing reality" (1975-1990), in which beliefs about the importance of the state's role in providing housing changed, and this was related to the changing economic context, when during this period most countries reduced spending on housing municipal, and housing has become more competitive and market-oriented.

The dynamics in the development of social housing could be noticed after 1945, especially in France, where there was an increased supply of social housing due to the large number of homeless people and living in poor conditions. In the 1960s, social housing was aimed at middle-class people at the beginning of their residence, and in the 1980s, as a result of initiatives towards housing ownership, social housing in France became the place of residence for the majority of less wealthy people (Levy-Vroelant, 2007). Such housing estates were built mainly in newly founded cities (French: *villes nouvelles*) or in suburbs where low-rent apartments were located (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*), often in huge housing complexes.

A big problem for this type of construction currently in France is the increase in socio-spatial segregation. The least affluent citizens using social housing live in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, while social tenants with higher incomes live in neighborhoods where a quarter of households are made up of people in managerial positions or people running their own businesses (Levy-Vroelant, 2007). Moreover, most immigrants in the municipal sector (70% compared to 55% for the entire social sector) lived in housing estates built between 1949 and 1974. A big problem for such people was leaving social housing due to the large difference in rents between social and private housing. In 2000, the *SRU Act* (12-13) was introduced, which imposed on the mayors of cities with a population of over 5,000 residents are obliged to have at least 20% of the total number of apartments in social housing. Currently, there are two types of organizations building social housing in France (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*) - public bodies financed by local authorities and non-profit housing construction organizations.

In turn, social housing in Germany has historically been based on subsidizing private enterprises by the public sector in order to build new social housing or revitalize existing housing estates. The legal basis for social housing was Act II<sup>5</sup>, introduced in the 1950s in Germany. *Wohnungsgesetz*, the aim of which was to create housing that was accessible to a wide group of recipients in terms of its size, equipment and rent level. In turn, in the GDR, social housing was concentrated in the hands of the state sector, which carried out mass construction called *Plattenbau*. However, 1/4 of all apartments throughout the country were run by local government administration (Droste, Knorr-Siedow, 2014) in the form of rental apartments, and 25% were run by workers' cooperatives. After the reunification of Germany,

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<sup>5</sup> Zweites Wohnungsbaugesetz (Wohnungsbau- und Familienheimgesetz - II. WoBauG)



a large part of the estates from the GDR period were abandoned by better-off residents, replaced by older and less wealthy people.

Social housing in Denmark since the 1940s has focused on small, centrally located housing estates. In the 1960s, estates of high-rise apartment blocks began to be built in the suburbs, which are now often plagued by social problems. The majority of Denmark's social housing sector consists of approximately 700 non-profit organizations that manage housing estates with a total of 511,000 homes. apartments (20% of Denmark's total housing stock). The public sector consists of only 2% of the total housing stock, however, since 1994, local government units have had to approve the construction of new social housing estates in their area (Scanlon, 2014).

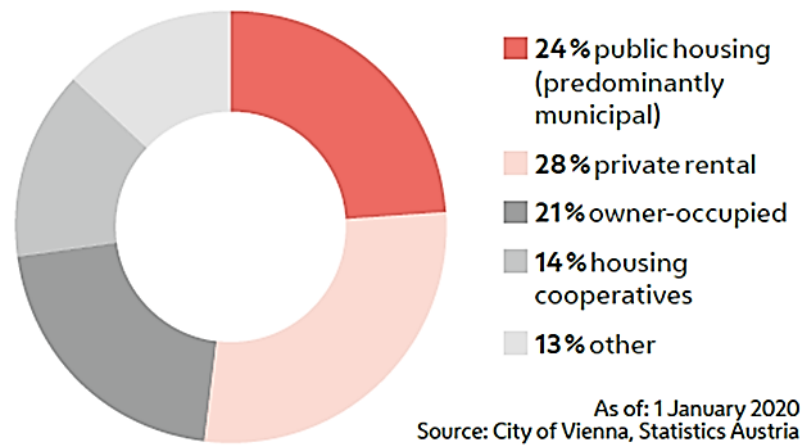
Since the 1990s, voices have been raised about increasing ethnic segregation, as nearly half of immigrants and refugees in Denmark live in public housing (Boligministeriet, 1996), a disproportionate percentage of them live in the oldest housing estates of the public sector and in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Between 1984 and 1993, the percentage of immigrants living in the most problematic neighborhoods tripled (Hummelgaard et al., 1997). The Danish social housing market, unlike the markets in some European countries such as England, increased from 1996 to 2006 from 19% to 21% of the total number of inhabited apartments in the country (Scanlon, 2007).

## **Social housing in Vienna**

Social housing in Vienna is considered a model way of developing social housing. This is due to the comprehensive approach to the topic and early systemic solutions, which was the program proposed at the turn of the 1920s, during the so-called "Red Vienna", which, in addition to the construction of social housing itself, also ensured the creation of a network of social, cultural, pedagogical activities and medical clinics, improving the quality of life of residents, including the previously neglected working class. Access to basic services thanks to the placement of service premises in social buildings is implemented in this type of construction in Vienna to this day, updating the needs to current conditions, supplementing the residential development with office spaces and apartments with sliding walls allowing to adjust the size of rooms and entire apartments depending on the needs. family size or other needs.

In 2020, 24% of Vienna's inhabitants lived in public housing - mainly social housing (Figure 1). Non-profit construction organizations have been mainly responsible for the growth of the social sector in recent years, with the sector growing by 75% between 2001 and 2020. The housing stock of social housing has a different distribution in Vienna and throughout Austria. When it comes to local government ownership, in Vienna 26% of the total housing stock is owned by local governments, while in Austria as a whole it is 10%. If this is related to the housing stock, social housing in Vienna is 48%, and in the rest of Austria it is 25%

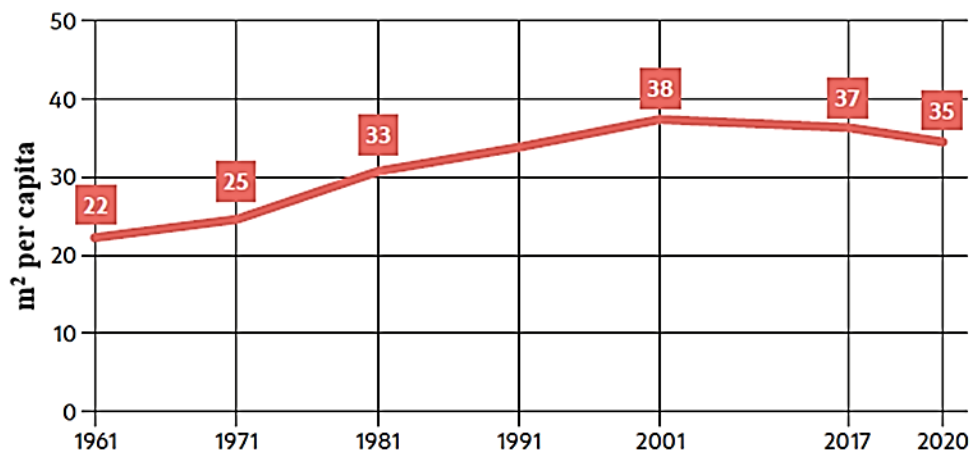
(Reinprecht, 2007). The privatization of the state housing stock since 2000 did not result in a decline in the number of social housing units in Vienna, as they constituted a small percentage of this type of housing.



**Figure 1.** Percentage breakdown of the housing market in Vienna in terms of ownership in 2020.

Source: Der Wiener Gemeindebau. Geschichte, Daten, Fakten, Stadt Wien – Wiener Wohnen, 2021.

In Austria in 2020, the rate of residents owning a flat was one of the lowest in Europe and amounted to 48.8%. In Vienna itself, this rate increased from 17.5% to 21% during the period under study. However, the average apartment area per person in residential buildings in Vienna was 35m<sup>2</sup> and compared to 2001 it decreased by 3m<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Average living space per person in Vienna in 1961-2020.

Source: Bauer, Fendt, 2023.

## Summary

The city of Vienna, as a model example of social housing with specific conditions that are difficult to find in other cities and being a city-land that can create its own tax policy, which largely financed social housing, has created a unique ability to meet housing needs through appropriate activities of organizational and administrative structures. and units responsible for construction and social housing management.

Based on the literature research and analyses, conclusions, directions and recommendations for further research in this area can be indicated.

- 1) A diverse approach to spatial planning, urban development programmes and the city's financial conditions over many years caused social housing in the Vienna area to have a wide cross-section of buildings, ranging from single, intimate estates to huge apartment blocks or entire quarters (Superblocks) located in different parts of the city, in every district.
- 2) The city currently has 210,600 social housing units, housing around 500,000 people. In addition to municipal housing, non-profit social housing is also developed within Vienna, so that approximately 60 per cent of the city's population lives in these two types of social housing (Ludwig, 2017). Social housing is developed evenly throughout the urban area, excluding the central districts, where there are only individual buildings. This has to do with the urban development model adopted in the early development of this type of residential property.
- 3) Living conditions in social housing vary according to the size of the housing complex, the period of its construction and its modernisation. The first buildings of this type that were built in the city significantly raised the living conditions, the subsequent buildings contributed to an increasing average flat size per inhabitant until 2001. The majority of flats are located in close proximity to public transport and services, which significantly contributes to the quality of life of their inhabitants. In 2019, 69.5 per cent of Gemeindebau flats were classified in category A on a three-stage scale, while 15 per cent were classified in category B. Scale A corresponds to an area of at least 30m<sup>2</sup>, comprising rooms such as a room, a kitchen or kitchenette, an entrance hall, a bathroom with toilet or a separate bathroom and toilet, and a common heating supply or equivalent heating in the flat. Scale B corresponds to the same set of rooms without additional facilities.
- 4) The most important advantages of the Viennese social housing model include favorable financial thresholds needed to apply for social housing, which allows for the creation of socially diverse housing estates, very good connectivity of housing estates regardless of the period of their construction, even distribution of real estate throughout the city and their wide range of sizes, as well as the inclusion of services in their structure.

The biggest disadvantage of the Viennese social housing model is its lack of universality due to specific administrative or tax conditions and the lack of adaptation of public spaces in older housing estates to the needs of universal planning.

- 5) The Vienna model is not fully adaptable to Polish conditions, due to differences resulting from administrative, legal and financial regulations, as well as a different model of approach to social housing in Austria and Poland (in Austria it is addressed to every citizen, in Poland only to the least wealthy people). The construction and land policy of social housing in Vienna results from existing Austrian and Viennese legal regulations. It would be of great value to adapt to Polish conditions (local government administration) a similar organizational level used in Vienna and to act for the development of the city in the area where the city has land resources or to purchase them for social housing before changing the local development plan for a given area. It is also worth considering the concept of social buildings that can perform various functions (apart from residential ones) and enabling residents to manage the size of their apartments.

A significant barrier in the pilot stage of research was the inability of the *Wiener Wohnen* organization to provide data on the social structure or ethnicity of residents of social housing. Hence, the study lacked analyzes of the demographic and social structures of residents of social housing estates, which constitute an important demand element of this housing construction market.

In the second stage of the research, the authors of the study plan to compare the Viennese social housing model with models used in other European cities, including Polish cities, which would enable a more objective assessment of individual models.

Another interesting issue would be to study and compare the quality of life in housing estates from the "Red Vienna" period and contemporary social housing in this city, as well as to compare the quality of life between social housing estates owned by the city and those built by non-profit construction organizations. Such issues would require the use of social research methods, including surveying residents, which, due to the above-mentioned limitations, was not possible at this stage of the research.

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