

Green social housing for all

Vienna, Austria

Mayor Michael Häupl

When it comes to quality of life, Vienna, the capital of Austria, always appears at the top of international rankings. The city's innovative housing policy certainly contributes to achieving these impressive results. Creating affordable high quality living spaces which meet architectural and environmental standards and offer high levels of comfort to its residents is a top priority for the local administration.

Innovative and environmentally-friendly architecture should be available for all. Home seekers have become critical consumers who want private outdoor space, playgrounds nearby and well lit access to their homes. And these homes must remain affordable for all Viennese. One of the biggest challenges for our city planners and architects lies in the combination of high quality living space and high quality outdoor space with a high level of density. Michael Häupl, Mayor of Vienna



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In Vienna, almost 60% of the households live in subsidised homes. Every year the city supports the completion of 5,000 to 7,000 social apartments, which corresponds to around 85% of the volume of the new homes constructed annually. All new housing projects that are to receive subsidies are subjected to a competition launched by the city, which aims at ensuring that tailored housing solutions are found, encouraging innovative architectural techniques and the preservation of the environment.

Since 2007 the environmental standards and legal regulations for constructing new social housing have been raised as well as the level of grants and subsidies for environmentally-friendly buildings. As a result, low-energy consumption (max. 30 kWh/ m²/year for heating) has become the rule in new houses, with more and more reaching “passive house standards” (less than 15 kWh/m²/year for heating) – which actually allows to build new houses in Vienna without any heating at all. In 2010, 20 to 30% of the new homes were built to passive house standards.

SMART-flats

For those who have limited savings and unwilling to take a mortgage, the city is stepping up the construction of the so-called SMART flats: low-cost homes of compact size that are ideal for young people at the start of their career, but also for single parents or senior citizens. Because of the reduced living space, the consumption of energy is also decreased. Until 2011 a total of 900 flats, apartments and shared flats were built in the area of the former railway stations. The architects and developers built eight different buildings with attractive open spaces and social infrastructure. An important strategy to keep the rents low is to provide compact flats and offer community spaces instead.

Bike City

Built as part of Vienna's efforts to encourage the use of bicycles, this social housing project aims at reducing car-parking space by 50% (the usual requirement being one plot per apartment) to make room for bike facilities such as bike storage rooms, bike repair centers and large elevators for those who want to take their bicycles up their flats. Bike City is situated right on a large inner-city park, next to a subway station and connected to the city's cycling network, allowing to reach both the city center and the Danube embankments within just a few minutes. Experiments with car-free or bike-friendly dwellings have been very successful in Vienna. Thus the city is looking into new solutions within the "Smart Cities" concept together with private companies.

Wood in the city

Vienna is also home to Austria's largest and tallest wooden housing complex. The seven-storey building is made of 2,400m³ of wood, a construction material known for the warmth and comfort it brings to residents but also for its sustainability. Even though wood is not the most economical construction material (it cost 10 to 15% more than others), according to developers and architects savings can be made on the construction process which is much faster than with other building materials. Obviously the major advantage of this kind of construction is the livability it brings to the residents while meeting high environmental standards.

Vienna – Key facts

- 1,757,000 inhabitants, about 20% of the country's population
- In 2010, 20 to 30% of all new houses in Vienna were built to passive house standards
- Almost 60% of the Viennese households live in subsidised homes. 220,000 of these are rented public housing.

As a signatory to the Covenant of Mayors the city of Vienna commits to reducing its CO₂ emissions by 21% by 2020

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