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Chapter

Contemporary Challenges and Future Strategies to Mitigate Social Inequality in Urban Housing: An Austrian Perspective

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Abstract

Urban housing in Europe is increasingly challenged by decreasing affordability and availability for an economically and demographically diversified population. Furthermore, residents become more dependent on housing policies that primarily satisfy (global) market demands instead of social needs. This chapter addresses these challenges by focusing on the economic (commodification), spatial (territorialization) and political (centralization) domains of housing. Based on a critical discussion of these domains, the chapter then presents strategies that are supposed to help mitigate social inequality in housing markets. While adaptations of the legal framework contribute to strengthening the social functions of housing, applying relational geography help release the municipals’ highly competitive hunting for residents within a containerized imagination of local planning. The promotion of commoning practices considers the need for neighborhood engagement to articulate concerns of the local communities. Communalism is vital, and the chapter proposes strategies to achieve this political state in neighborhood communities. This plea is illustrated by taking an Austrian perspective on housing policy.

Keywords: decommodification, deterritorialization, decentralization, communalism, social infrastructure, relational geography, commoning

1. Introduction

The current housing economy and policy in market-based countries such as Austria are characterized by interrelated structural, functional and processual facts. One of these facts is a prevailing territorial planning paradigm, which rests primarily upon an internal dominance of local residential development and largely ignores the regional scale of a joint housing development. Furthermore, municipalities with their containerized spatial thinking of land use policies produce a situation of competition among each other to gain (high-income) residents and take less care on low(er)-income households.
A second fact is given with a predominant focus on the capital value of a housing unit and consequently de-valuing the use value of a home as a place of shelter and social interaction. That is, building housing units obeys primarily market rules, with problematic side-effects, among others are housing vacancy, touristic use of dwellings or temporarily used second homes. In other words, commodification outperforms societal needs.

Closely interrelated with commodification and territorialization is, thirdly, the centralization of housing and neighborhood policy situated in the municipal government. Even though policy decisions are legitimated by representative-democratic principles, the local government largely ignores the participation and involvement of neighborhoods affected by housing planning decisions.

A socially more sustainable future for housing has to deal with these politically challenging facts, which jeopardize local social cohesion and affect poverty and inequality negatively. Approaches discussed in this chapter focus on these three domains and consider transformations in, firstly, the legal framework, and secondly, in a changing understanding of the geographical framing of planning by introducing a relational spatial model of local and trans-local housing development. Thirdly, a strong plea for commoning practices is outlined, allowing for a local-democratic allocation of housing and neighborhood relations based on societal needs instead of market-driven mechanisms. All these approaches are supposed to contribute to housing poverty and inequality mitigation. They will be discussed in an Austrian urban context, excluding Vienna due to its exceptional social housing policy. Vienna’s housing policy is characterized by a significantly higher proportion of social housing than any other Austrian city. This policy dates back to the post-First-World-War period when the city started to build dwellings in public municipal ownership (Gemeindebau). In addition, social housing companies have contributed to this
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housing segment for decades, which means that today 45% of Vienna’s housing market is government-sponsored [1]. Figure 1 illustrates the legal status of housing at the level of federal states.

2. Contemporary challenges in urban housing

Present urban housing problems and conflicts result, to a large part, in the prevailing neoliberal market regime, which privileges capital value against use value, promotes competition among cities on residents and values the national or global reputation of real estate markets higher than local residents’ needs. The following sections shed some light on these conflicts by taking three perspectives: the economic perspective of commodification, the geographical perspective of territorialization and the political perspective of centralization.

2.1 Commodification of housing

Current housing policy in market economies is impacted by a charged relationship in three interrelated domains. While the structural domain is struggling with the home as a market object versus the home as an object of social inclusion and participation, the functional domain is rivaling between the home as a strategy of capital accumulation and the home as a place to perform various activities such as interacting with others, working, recreating and learning. The material domain, at last, competes with the home as a commodity on the one hand and the home as a private place of shelter and safe haven of personal identity preservation on the other. These three domains are not static, neither historically nor geographically. In fact, they depend on individual needs and socio-cultural habits. Variations in income correlate with biographical life cycles and household composition, which, in turn, often affect residential migration patterns with shifting housing expectations. In addition, an increasing number of single-person households – of younger and older persons – is to be taken into account. New forms of cohabitation, beyond the yet dominating two-generational family, are increasing. However, anything but commonly offered since “[a]lternative forms of housing such as social co-housing, or housing associations […] are growing but still marginal compared to mainstream architecture” ([3], p. 76 f.).

Due to the prevailing belief in the neoliberal paradigm of markets, this charged relationship is significantly imbalanced toward market competition, capital accumulation and commodification. Commodification is defined as the transformation of a ‘thing’ – a good, a service or even the own body – into a tradable unit on markets, followed by the subjugation of use value to exchange or capital value [4]. The problem of commodification of housing units rests upon weakening its meaning as social infrastructure and promoting capital profit orientation instead. Critical urban geography and policy stress the fundamental failure of housing markets to adequately address the social or community relevance of housing since markets rely on supply and demand rather than needs [5]. The commodification of housing is fueled by accumulated capital searching for long-term and secure profitable reinvestments [6, 7].

The growing albeit contested profit-seeking housing commodification regime relies on a legal framework at the Austrian national and EU supranational scale that prioritizes private property against collective property [8] and competition against public services with only a few exceptions [9]. Public housing assistance is strictly defined and dedicated to unemployed persons or those who work in low-income
sectors. It must not affect the private housing market negatively regarding rents and return. Austrian public housing regulations are comparatively comprehensive, notwithstanding, seeking to reach low- and middle-income households. In addition to the formal legal framing of private property, the legal coding of capital became an important step to safeguard the aim of accumulation against other interests. This fact has thoroughly been outlined by Pistor [10].

The consequences of housing commodification are far-reaching and encompass housing vacancy, a commercially touristic utilization of homes, and the spread of second homes. In the city of Salzburg, for example, about 4–5% of all housing units are estimated vacant (not occupied for one year at least) [11]. According to a recent study in Salzburg [12], the touristic use of homes is another push factor that withdraws apartments from the housing market. The Airbnb platform offers 700 apartments, equivalent to almost 1% of the existing housing stock. The number of urban second homes, utilized only for some weeks during the year (however, including a small proportion of apartments occupied by students), is significant in larger Austrian cities. The last national census of 2011 reveals 18.3% in Innsbruck, 17.1% in Salzburg, 15.8% in Graz and 13.7% in Linz [12].

These developments indicate the growing problem of safeguarding the social infrastructure nature of housing and call for political interventions as outlined by the United Nations ‘Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’ or the ‘The Right to Adequate Housing’. Both declarations are dedicated to harnessing market-driven profit-making by increasing awareness of all human beings’ basic needs, as expressed by the ‘leaving no one behind’ proclamation. The Right to Adequate Housing principles encompasses, among other things, the “right to choose one’s residence, to determine where to live and to freedom of movement”, “equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing” or “security of tenure” [13]. SDG 11 pursues the goal of safe and affordable housing by 2030 [14]. These goals most explicitly consider the circumstances of the poor and economically deprived.

2.2 Territorialization of spatial organization

From a functional and demand-side perspective, housing can be conceived as living at a particular place at a particular time. The living place is one node of a network of locations where other activities such as working, shopping for food or other things, learning, attending cultural events or doing sports are performed. These functional-spatial networks are not topologically fixed in size, scale and scope but may change with varying working places, biographical requirements, household composition or personal needs and aspirations. However, they remain relational in their spatial structure, and the use value of a dwelling depends critically on the respective topology.

From a market and supply-side perspective, housing relies crucially on a territorial, containerized spatial organization. The monetary assessment of a particular housing unit may be partly influenced by quality standards of the building itself and interior appointments but is determined mainly by the location. The location, in turn, is evaluated comparatively by the value of the neighboring properties. As comparison is a core requirement in market economies to strive for reinvesting accumulated capital, the containerized space serves this need perfectly. Thus, the exchange value of a dwelling depends critically on the respective territoriality.

Although the binary between territorial and topological organizations of political, economic and social functions represents empirical facts in a too simplistic manner, its core idea can claim some justification. While globalization and supra-national
political institutionalizations established spaces of flows – of goods, capital, information and people – and networks of global cities [15, 16], developments such as regulating (refugee) migration, combatting pandemic or coding capital are instances of attempts of re-territorialization. However, any attempts to conflate territorial with topological geographies must be wary of fetishizing either of these spaces.

A predominantly territorial, containerized imagination of spatial organization nurtures competition among cities and municipalities in attracting (high-income) households because their public budgets rely strongly on taxes redistributed on the number of primary residents. Demographically shrinking municipalities thus lose income and attention, and they are simultaneously enforced to preserve the still existing infrastructure from dereliction. Demographically growing municipalities must locate new housing blocks and infrastructure, and will yield new income by reallocating taxes after some time. Due to the high attractiveness of most Austrian large cities, suburban municipalities benefit from this competition of people. This is, however, not always and necessarily the case, as medium-sized cities like Eisenerz in Styria illustrate. Eisenerz, a town of 3800 inhabitants in 2020, lost more than 9100 people over the past 70 years. On the other hand, the population of some neighboring municipalities likes, for example, Trofaiach grew remarkably during the same period, partly from households that moved from Eisenerz [17].

The competition between municipalities is geographically volatile since real estate investment strategies have to cope with changing households’ lifestyle preferences [18], transforming regional economic and labor markets, and staging mainstream aspirations of where to live the most satisfying life [19]. The main phases had been urbanization, suburbanization, counter-urbanization, and re-urbanization. Gentrification is perhaps the most prominent phenomenon of the current re-urbanization of middle- and upper-class households [20, 21]. Due to an accelerating number of heat days and tropical nights or other climate-change effects [22], and because of experienced challenges of corona measures, a renaissance of suburbanization might likely happen in the near future.

A containerized spatial organization of housing (markets) relates closely to the problem of “methodological nationalism”, which equates society with the nation state’s territory. The methodology construes internal homogeneity and external exclusion to secure own political and economic interests. This principle, in other words, legitimates global inequality [23]. Its principle idea can be scaled down to the local level and applied methodologically to the administrative units of municipalities. Complementing this unilateral orientation with a relational spatial organization would mitigate housing poverty because it relieves the comparative competition between territories.

2.3 Centralization of political decisions

Spatial planning in Austria – like in other European federal states – is organized hierarchically, with a strong position of local municipalities developing and executing plans that transform agriculturally used land into plots dedicated to housing, public or commercial use. However, the local territorial planning authority is simultaneously embedded into a system of the regional, federal state and national planning levels, which delineate their targets for future spatial development according to explicit efforts of economic, social and ecological sustainability and efficiency. While the latter levels are meant to be recommendations to be considered compulsory by the local level, the local planning manifestations rest upon national laws, i.e., decisions of the local government must be executed on its territory.
Political processes of land allocation and dedication of agricultural land, forests or brownfield zones to be transformed into plots for commercial or residential buildings are, by and large, limited to the local government and subsequent public administration. Public participation is highly formalized by raising objections against already existing plans. A proactive inclusion of engaged citizens from the beginning of the planning process, which would have the power to intervene through local-democratic procedures, is not given in general. Due to the far-reaching and comprehensive legal protection of plots and built housing units by private property laws, citizens in general and affected neighbors, in particular, have thus no direct intervention capabilities. However, local (urban) planning rules set the frame on the type and degree of building and land use to which property owners have to obey.

Besides the hardly existing public involvement in the local spatial development of neighborhoods, a public discussion about a neighborhood’s architecture is likewise not envisaged. Usually, it is performed as an interplay between architects and officially designated experts, representing the local government’s opinion [24].

A problematic implication of this authoritarian top-down-driven spatial figuration of our housing (and living) environment is an epic standardization of housing design, following a conservative role model of the two-generational family. As a result, each housing unit has its predefined function with little flexibility for multi-purpose activities throughout the day or week. Such a standardized architecture largely ignores the increase of different living forms and household communities that evolved over the past three or so decades. Furthermore, home-based COVID-19 measures have uncovered the weakness of missing multi-functional places for working, learning, eating and sleeping.

Another problem with this planning policy is a lack of control of the local government. Although elected representatives decide how planning principles are to be interpreted in a particular case, it nevertheless often follows political pressure, dictated by allegedly economic constraints of maximizing profits. A lack of control reveals a positive feedback loop of capital accumulation aspirations, territorial competition and local selfishness, supported by a vertical and horizontal planning structure. In other words, commodification overrules social infrastructure, territorial boundedness overrules community networks and statist planning bureaucracy overrules inclusive local participation and civic engagement. The next chapter will discuss approaches that cope with these critical structures, functions and processes.

3. Future housing strategies to mitigate social inequality

Distinguishing the three domains of “commodification”, “territorialization” and “centralization” is one option to cope with housing policies in neoliberal market economies. It offers a distinctive variation of views by considering economic, geographical and political perspectives on possible future housing developments. We will start with the economic domain of commodification and discuss some opportunities to de-commodify housing. By adding relational and commoning strategies to disqualify unilateral politics of territorialization and centralization, a re-enforcing process between the three “de” counter-domains – de-commodification, deterritorialization and decentralization – is supposed to be taken place.
3.1 Adapting the legal framework

Housing commodification can be mitigated through a deliberate reform of the legal planning framework without getting inevitably in conflict with the overarching private property legislation. One option in this regard is to reactivate housing vacancies (including, where possible, office vacancies). Vacancy rates are significant in most Austrian cities, such as Salzburg, as has been mentioned above. The federal states of Salzburg and Tyrol have adopted a vacancy levy in July 2022, whereby the fee depends on the size and the construction type. For instance, in Salzburg, a maximum of 400 € (and 800 € for newly built apartments) can be charged annually by the municipality for housing units up to 40 square meters. The overall maximum charge is 2500 € (5000 € respectively) [25]. Several exceptions exist, some of which are reasonable from the de-commodification standpoint: derelict apartments are excluded, as are those with care-dependent persons who moved to sheltered accommodation. Other exceptions like housing vacancies dedicated to the future retirement of the next generation are less well justified.

A second and closely related option would be a revision of the second-home status. A strict(er) definition of “second homes” is needed and should be reduced to only a few exceptions for students or persons who live in the city for at least six months (verification can be obtained through power meter measurements).

The growing touristic usage of apartments is another profit-seeking market development that fuels commodification since turnover is significantly higher than it, is with permanent residents. Public control of the proper use of apartments is difficult to realize because landlords and landladies can command their private property as they wish to do. However, political intervention in the social housing sectors is possible as they have dedicated rules on how to use the homes accordingly. Austrian cities have recently – and partly successfully – started campaigns to persecute and penalize commercial offers of social housing units, for example, at Airbnb.

Another major driving force of housing commodification, in general, is not caused by the housing unit itself but the land underneath. If farmland is planned to be transformed into residential land use by the municipal government, then the capital value is commonly skyrocketing, most likely in urban and suburban regions. With this declarative shift of land use, the landowners become very rich. Although they are legally required to enforce the governmental decision – it is, in fact, based on an application submitted by them – within a timeframe of 10 years, very often nothing happens except that the capital value of the land is further growing. A de-commodification policy on dedicated residential (or commercial) land use would be to (i) reduce the 10-year timeframe significantly, (ii) execute the law consequently and (iii) introduce a tax on the profits generated with the land use change.

A further political instrument in housing de-commodification would be the introduction of temporarily limited and regionally adapted building moratoria. The idea is to pause the construction of new residential complexes in the future and thus interrupt the profit dynamics. Moratoria have been valued as a proper strategy in general [26] and have been introduced recently in some Austrian municipalities, for example, “Haus im Ennstal” and “Velden am Wörthersee” [27].

In order to strengthen collaboration between municipalities in housing planning, the local planning rules should be legally and strictly tied to the regional level. This shift would mitigate both the competition for residents and companies and the lavish commerce with land and resources. While the planning of housing estates would leave
the territorially bounded container space, the concrete realization of where to build new apartments would remain within the local territory. This option, however, would affect a transformation of spatial thinking (and public budgeting) and will, therefore, be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2 Applying relational geographies

A second domain appropriate to transform contemporary housing market structures and functions rests upon surmounting the unilateral fixation on the territorial geography of market organization. This perspective can claim some evidence since “[n]eoliberalisation and the opening up of global markets, as well as intensifying the modes and level of exploitation that take place through capital accumulation, has been a major driving force in the disruption of territory as a factor in political economy, culture and identity” ([28], p. 1646).

The idea of surmounting, however, does not imply a substitution of territorial thinking with topological spatialities but is meant to conflate both in an emancipatory understanding of local housing needs. In so doing, we, according to Ince [29], refer to an “anarchist approach to territory that foregrounds bordering as a legitimate spatial strategy that refuses and moves beyond a statist-capitalist framework for understanding the role and nature of territorial practices, and that can produce emancipatory spaces in the process”.

Relational conceptions of space can claim their particular success because they deconcentrate (spatial relations) and decentralize (power relations) to the concrete local spots, aiming – at least implicitly – to oppose authoritarian constraints. By pursuing a relational strategy, territorial space properties do not disappear but diminish their exclusionary characteristics. Role models of this spatial type have been available for a long time, such as consortia between research and education institutions or global city networks [30], to mention just two examples.

When reflecting on the meaning of relational spaces, we must keep in mind that a municipality’s spatial gestalt is arbitrary due to different reasons. Any ideas and visions about housing architecture and neighborhood infrastructure are restricted to plans, programs and political decisions, which must be applied to the entire territory in equal measure. For example, car parking capacity rules – underground and ground-level – of larger housing complexes in Austrian cities are to be followed by housing construction companies with little flexibility concerning their number and distribution. It is, however, not possible today to develop a housing complex without car parking slots, even though the new residents would prefer such an option because the complex is well connected to public transportation from their point of view.

Therefore, a neighborhood community should be politically able to decide on their local circumstances of housing and environment by interlinking territorial and relational geographies. This instance can be generalized to housing architecture (co-housing), public neighborhood space design (potential conflicts between younger and older residents), social mixing (private property and social housing) and functional mixing (housing with labor, recreation, and shops). This way, territorial practices are re-introduced to contribute to solving future housing needs decentrally.

In addition, a relational perspective includes novel approaches in municipal collaboration, albeit not necessarily between territorially bounded units. Future housing questions are then discussed between several places by considering social and ecological concerns that interrelate local with regional requirements. A prerequisite for its achievement would be a transformation of the current
budgetary fundament a municipality depends on, which is income and commercial
tax redistribution to a large degree. Examples of collaborative school planning and
national park planning do exist but are not mandatory and committed. Similarly,
the central place approach in settlement planning follows relational principles at a
regional level.

The network geography would complement territorial planning politics by
emphasizing local housing needs in relation to other – already existing or yet
developing – structural links (infrastructure) that connect functional activities in
an appropriate manner, whereby appropriateness is defined by the local collectives
that belong to the networks at hand. It would help to reduce the competitive-selfish
momentum of exclusionary territorial planning due to reciprocal mechanisms of
exchanges of money and tangible and intangible infrastructures [31]. Furthermore,
it would help to promote local community participation and engagement with their
natural and social environments. This idea refers to communalism or libertarian
socialism and seeks to conflate individual autonomy with collective commitment
[32]. As a local-democratic initiative, it is seen as an essential ingredient to conquer-
ing housing commodification and an authoritarian housing policy and philosophy.

3.3 Promoting Commoning practices

The third domain, coping with decentralization and relocation strategies,
refers to commons and commoning. Commons can be defined as arrangements of
co-production, co-consumption and co-utilization of goods, services, land and, not
least, housing. They rearrange access to all these ‘things’ through collective structures
of participation in political decision-making processes at the local scale [33]. The
idea of commons also includes alternative forms of cohabitation by promoting the
sharing of devices, offering rooms for common use or the co-caring for children and
older people.

Thanks to an increased awareness of the far-reaching adverse effects of neoliberal
capitalism, commons received a renaissance over the last two or so decades. Their
aspirations are committed to all domains of the sustainability and socio-ecological
transformation discourses since commons do not only strive for intermingling
individual wellbeing with collective wellbeing, which tightens relationships among
residents. Anarchistic-inspired commons also take ecological concerns seriously
into account, as they explicitly attempt to reduce resource and energy consumption
by substituting market-individualistic with community-individualistic strategies
of housing and mobility patterns. Furthermore, those commons establish plans and
programs that combine private with collective property, promote sharing economy
models and prioritize public transportation offers.

A recently published “micro-political manifesto” [34] to housing cooperatives
proposes several political activities to approach a revised understanding of housing as
a core part of social infrastructure. Among other things, the manifesto sticks up for

• activating micro-political actors and networks

• developing skills for commoning practice

• claiming housing as a shared resource

• claiming responsibility through collective ownership
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• incorporating collective land use within planning frameworks

• establishing cooperative properties as social and cultural assets ([34], p. 11–39).

In order to realize a transformation toward commoning practices in the fields of housing and neighborhood relations, different tactics need to be applied, considering local circumstances explicitly. In the context of a cooperative housing project in São Paulo, Brazil, Ventura [35] stresses a strong interlinkage between local (neighborhood) and global (the city) housing policies – “that micro-political organization can only unfold its full potential if it also gains macro-political relevance” to oppose to prevailing neoliberal capitalism of housing economy. Similarly, Woldeyessus [36] focuses on strategies that bridge “representational collectives” (government) and “collective representations” (governance), i.e. strategies that mutually interlink local parliaments of elected delegates with collectives representing civil society movements.

Another example that promotes affordable non-profit housing and a transformation from property to belonging is the German Mietshäuser Syndikat [37]. The legal organization rests upon the rule to prioritize the “utility value” against its “capital value”. This rule is achieved by a “model of divided ownership: every housing project is owned by a limited liability company (Haus GmbH), which – in turn – is owned by two shareholders, the Hausverein (Dwellers’ Association) and the Mietshäuser Syndikat. [...] While the structure of the limited liability company allows the Hausverein to be self-sufficient in all questions concerning the use and management of the house, the Mietshäuser Syndikat has the mandate to safeguard the ownership status of a building and to prevent the property from privatization” ([37], p. 136).

Another model for financing collective housing property is micro-funding, which has been applied more often to the so-called Global South [38].

The outlined commoning approaches inspired us to reflect on potential translations into the Austrian context. Any attempts to decentralize future housing and neighborhood policies would increase their success if micro-political activities were interrelated with macro-political framing programs. These programs would pave the way for a growing diversity – in number and nature – of housing forms to oppose the highly standardized housing architecture, following the idea of a mono-functional use of rooms and praising the two-generational family as a role model.

Explorable references in a European context are, for example, the pioneering housing and neighborhood design activities in Zurich, Switzerland (Kraftwerk, Kalkbreite, Mehr als Wohnen) [39]. Intellectually grounded on libertarian communalism and outlined in programmatic writings such as Bookchin [40] and P.M. [41], their practical transformations reveal versatile ideas and imaginations about alternative ways of cohabitation. “This utopian attempt articulated for the first time the idea of agency through design, shattering the existing urban order and replacing its conventional typologies with a free-flowing, autonomous entity in collective ownership” ([39], p. 182).

To mitigate poverty and reduce social inequality, increased diversity of housing architectures, allowing for multi-functional uses, is needed. This need is also reflected in a changing composition of households, with an increased number of single-person and single-parent as well as multi-person homes beyond the kinship model. Moreover, new migration and mobility patterns require novel approaches to diversified housing supplies, ranging from tiny mobile homes and temporary housing communities to fully-furnished apartments offered by local communities or municipalities. Unfortunately, the housing market supply has not yet sufficiently anticipated
these new demand patterns. However, the first experiments of social co-housing with privately and collectively used rooms, car-free neighborhoods and collectively shared goods and services exist in Austria [42]. A prominent example is given with the habiTAT [43]. An overview of alternative, participatory housing models can be found in [44, 45] for Austria, and [46] for Switzerland.

The idea of communitarian housing can be extended to the co-utilization of goods and services needed in a neighborhood community. Bikes and cars, tools, garden devices, books, kitchens and many more things are worth being included as part of a local sharing economy. Furthermore, the re-invention of subsistence framing as an innovative economic approach in the food sector to provide households within a regional range would also be part of the commoning vision. Formally situated between small-scale urban gardening and commercial urban farming, subsistence farming increases neighborhood food autonomy and decreases transportation efforts effectively and sustainably. While urban gardening is very popular in European cities [47], subsistence farming is still in its infancy. Further models of subsistence could be used in the energy sector. The production of local solar, water or wind power likewise contributes to enhancing independence from national or global energy production – a fact whose significance will rise in the future due to climate change policy efforts and the revealed severe dependency on energy resources from the Russian government and other authoritarian states.

One recently realized example of a communitarian housing project is “Cooperative Housing Volkersdorf” near Graz [48]. This project offers 28 apartments for 63 people to date. Several of the characteristics highlighted above have been realized in Volkersdorf, such as a partial subsistence economy in food production, renewable energy production, use of ecological resources in housing construction and co-working opportunities nearby.

The success of community-driven housing can be enhanced if intermediary nodes between local communities and urban housing representatives are introduced. Those nodes – commonly referred to as neighborhood managers – serve as bridging relations between the macro- and micro-levels in urban politics on the one hand and relations among residents of the cooperative(s) on the other. This relational capacity can be defined as “performed urbanism”, which differs from patterns of “self-organized urbanism” (the idealistic form of solving conflicts) and “instrumentalized urbanism” (exploiting urban amenities with no or little personal contribution) [49].

Models of performed urbanism have been established in newly created larger housing complexes in, for example, Salzburg, for some years. They complement other social services at the city district level. Neighborhood management is organized jointly by the city administration and social associations, like the Diakoniewerk [50]. The neighborhood managers provide services to satisfy the residents’ heterogeneous needs and contribute to moderating controversy. Also, public rooms can be used for different events that bring residents closer together. This approach of vertically and horizontally intermediary collaboration can serve as a role model for self-organized housing cooperatives in one way or the other.

4. Conclusion

The three “de”-perspectives culminate in a common political center-point that we can adequately circumscribe with the notions of “communalism” or “libertarian municipalism”, two concepts that have been coined by Murray Bookchin [40]. Among
other things, they express the necessity to withdraw particular goods and services from the market because they satisfy the basic needs of all people, irrespective of income, social status or any other discriminatory difference. They are common goods. Besides goods and services of health and education, mobility, food and water, safe and livable environment, it is housing in its material and social-relational conditions. Libertarian municipalism conflates the singularity of women and men with their socially derived individual aspirations on the one hand and the collectivity of the local neighborhood in which they are socially embedded on the other.

In order to re-strengthen the commitment to the local spatial and social environment, political decentralization becomes one core ingredient in future housing policies. To put the housing's function of social infrastructure to the fore and defend its primary purpose as a means of cohabitation aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and does not inevitably jeopardize its value-preserving meaning. In fact, this latter meaning remains relevant, considering the ecological sustainability of our societal transformation in the Anthropocene. The commodification of the home is neither necessary nor desirable any longer, which, in turn, fosters de-commodification as another core ingredient in future housing policy. The local is not an isolated and unconnected spot on the earth's surface like a sand grain on a sand hill, but a node in a network of interrelated nodes. The relations may functionally vary, but the essential point is that distance is not metric but relational. This functional shift produces a different pattern of collaboration and cohabitation, surmounting the traditional understanding of territorial inclusion and exclusion. Not least, deterritorialization turns out to be the third core ingredient in future housing policy. There is no ideal or perfect point where all three "de"-perspectives merge. The decisive moment is that they have left the corner points of their counterparts.

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