



Our business areas

We design social processes in housing and urban development.

We consider liveable and socially sustainable living environments to be a basic human need. Neighbourhood and cohesion are of great importance for our individual well-being, but also for social cohesion. That's why we create communicative spaces in which living and living environments can be designed together. In this way, we support people in developing a sense of social security and at the same time participating in society and taking responsibility for their environment.

Our four business areas:



Social Sustainability in Housing

By social sustainability, we mean measures that aim to increase the quality of life and housing by taking into account basic social needs in the development and settlement of housing projects.

The terms neighbourhood, community, social exchange, respect and tolerance play a central role in this. In our activities, it is important to us to start early - ideally before occupancy - in order to offer the residents the opportunity to help shape their future home, e.g. the common rooms and the open space. This is done through information events and workshops that serve to get to know each other and to build structures of self-organization (such as work or topic groups). In this way, neighbourly activities such as cooking groups, (cycling) workshops, urban gardening, exercise, games, fitness and much more are created in the house and around it. These activities are free and they are on-site; i.e. reachable without travel time. The greatest importance, however, is that they avoid loneliness and create a feeling of neighbourly security and being at home, which can be a great help and enrichment of everyday life for people who are confronted with special challenges (such as single parents, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed and migrants).

Since 2008, "social sustainability" has been a quality feature of subsidized Viennese housing. Every housing project must have a concept for social sustainability, which has contributed to a significant increase in the quality of life in Viennese housing. In addition, the so-called "fourth pillar" (= social sustainability) has become a key driver of innovation for residential construction, because it not only involves all actors in construction, but also explicitly the actors in housing such as property managers, area managers, municipal offices and also social scientists and social process facilitators such as realitylab. Through the introduction of social sustainability, it has been possible to take a more holistic view of housing and, beyond the built space, to grasp and design housing as a space for social interactions. The term, like residential construction as a whole, is subject to ongoing development and redefinition.



Colloborative Housing

We see collaborative housing groups (Baugruppen, Co-Housing Groups) as projects in which the aspect of social sustainability is given particularly intensive consideration. This is usually expressed in the fact that the formation of a close-knit household is sought. Collaborative housing projects usually have the following characteristics:

- relatively early in the project, a core group is formed that determines the essential qualities of the house (e.g. timber construction) and the content orientation (e.g. ecology or intergenerational living).
- The group independently selects experts to accompany them in the implementation of the project: e.g. social process facilitators such as realitylab, but also the planning team and the developer.
- new members who join the collaborative housing group are also selected by the group itself.

We have been supporting assemblies for more than 10 years in a wide variety of phases. Our support usually includes the following elements:

- Vision-finding in a weekend workshop. The vision serves to clarify common goals and motivates the group for the upcoming development period
- Establishment of structures of self-organization. Our goal is to make ourselves superfluous as companions and supporters as soon as possible, because the group runs and develops its project independently.
- Group expansion according to the criteria that the group has set for itself. We support you in promoting the project and selecting the right members.
- Moderation of meetings of the large group, the steering committee and the various working groups
- Moderation of the project team consisting of the planners, the developer and the architects - which can be very helpful, for example, during the drafting of contracts and when prioritizing savings and special requests.

- Accompaniment in the change from a building group to a residential group, with the associated topics of equipping common rooms, daily living together, but also property management, etc.

The role that collaborative housing plays in the success of new urban development areas is generally recognized - not least because they can bring in a user perspective and concrete needs at an early stage, but also because they can set social and social impulses as well as cultural accents and contribute to a revitalization of urban space. Therefore, cities are increasingly starting to allocate a small proportion of the building plots to building groups and to hold competitions for them. Since the application deadlines are usually quite short, we prepare projects together with an architectural firm and invite interested parties to initial information events. As always, our goal is to promote the emergence of a group as quickly as possible that knows what it wants, decides together and implements its project in a self-organized way.



Collaborative neighborhood and city making, renovation and decarbonisation of the existing city

When new urban districts are created – such as in Seestadt Aspern, in the Sonnwendviertel at the main train station, in the Wiesen, at Kempelenpark or in Berresgasse, it becomes clear that the living and quality of life of the residents depends not only on their own home, but also very much on the urban (open) space between the buildings and the urban structure in which they are embedded. With the expansion of the Property Advisory Board into a Quality Advisory Board for Neighbourhood Developments, the Housing Fund of the City of Vienna has created an important accompanying instrument to bring the actors and stakeholders involved into interaction and align them towards common goals; in addition to housing, these include cross-site community facilities, social mix and supportive social services, sustainable mobility and energy supply, recreational open spaces, nutritious green spaces, local amenities and commerce, as well as a wide range of cultural offerings.

In recent years, we have increasingly focused on the development of the existing city. Vienna's ambitious goal of becoming CO₂-neutral by 2040 can only be achieved through thermal and energy-efficient renovations of the building stock – keyword "Get out of gas". This entails huge investments and social challenges.

We are asking ourselves right now:

- What does socially just decarbonisation look like?
- How do we motivate people for the climate, energy and heat transition?
- How do we find social, communal answers to current crises and challenges?
- How do we help resource communities to organize themselves?

Our approach is to motivate people to participate and involve them in urban circular economies. If we take the climate crisis seriously, then we all have to take action and see ourselves as part of the solution. Specifically, we develop concepts for participatory neighbourhood management with the aspects of urban agriculture, energy and mobility communities.



Research with a focus on renovation, energy and digitalisation

In order to better master the challenges in the fields of activity described above, we conduct intensive research activities. In cooperation with experts from other companies and universities, we develop new interdisciplinary solutions and methods. The most important cooperation partners, however, are the residents and other actors in selected demo areas or demo areas, with whom we develop and try out new things together.

We pay special attention to the following topics:

- Renovation: Apartment buildings and other existing buildings in need of renovation with tenants or with owners' associations are considered "difficult". Together with other experts, we tackle the hot potato and develop innovative and inviting processes for participation. In our models, we take into account the different financial potentials and transfer learnings from our assembly projects.
- In the case of decarbonisation, too, it often makes more sense for neighbours to join forces, e.g. to build a local heating network. Especially in energy matters, a joint approach brings many advantages in terms of efficiency and costs; however, there are also many social benefits when the neighborhood is activated. That is why we are researching the social development of energy communities and placing a special focus on heat, which, unlike electricity, is still uncharted territory for energy communities.
- Digitalization: Since the founding of realitylab, we have been using digital tools for the self-organization of our

resource communities: cloud-based office tools, messenger services, digital bulletin boards, dashboards, booking tools, etc. Our long-term goal is an ecosystem of open-source systems that support the socio-economic interactions of resource communities and evolve with them.

We are currently involved in around 10 research projects with around 30 national and international research partners ([see e.g. our research projects at the FFG website](#))