

# The Key Issue of Framework Conditions

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Concluding observations  
and prospects

The contributions to this book, and especially the study of newer Sozialbau housing estates are an appraisal: can we speak of “good co-existence” of residents of different origins? The result of written questionnaires, interviews and visits is on the whole most positive. At the same time it shows many differences with regard to groups of people, location, age and size of the housing estates as well as critical points. On the basis of this appraisal there are indications for the management of existing housing estates and the planning of new ones.

In existing housing it is a matter of limiting grounds for conflict, mediation and enabling residents’ initiatives on the basis of continual monitoring of life on the estates. For the planning of new housing the approach should be to avoid architectonic elements and spaces which experience has shown lead to conflicts.

The key issue is thus “framework conditions”. A housing company can create them, the rest is in the hands of responsible, active residents, regardless of their origin. The main points are set out below.

## ► *For existing housing*

### **Moderation**

Caretakers and housing managers are in many senses intermediaries. A continually moderated exchange of ideas about experience on individual housing estates can help in overcoming difficulties.

Current efforts on all sides towards “more diversity in public and private services” could result in more people of various origins becoming

caretakers or working in housing management. Caretakers who themselves have a history of migration can build bridges to other migrants and also to Austrian residents.

There is high approval for the local neighbourhoods of housing estates although individual problems should be recognised. Housing companies should also take up the task of bringing together “old and new” in large-scale, inner-city development projects in cooperation with municipal bodies active in the area.

## **Mediation**

The findings on conflicts and conflict solutions show a clear necessity for the increased expansion of mediation. Mediation should not only first be used when there is reason to intervene but also where potential or latent conflicts are smouldering. In particular, the needs of residents going through difficult phases of life – as is frequently the case with single-parents and the infirm and elderly – should be actively addressed.

## **Self-organisation and dialogue with the housing companies**

Local levels of autonomous organisation and forms of communication between residents cannot and should not be set up on a “top-down” basis organised by the housing management. However, they can be promoted through “empowerment” – meaning providing structures such as access to digital information media and spaces for meeting – and by encouraging residents’ independent initiatives.

Desirable dialogue between the companies and the residents could be further improved by decentralised information systems (e.g. wider provision of digital information screens on the estates, with apps as well as with more on-the-spot meetings). The greater participation desired could be achieved through the development of creative offers to get involved, of tenants’ representation as well as in other ways.

The potential that has become apparent of integrated residents who have lived here for some time should be “unlocked” for interethnic understanding. They would be good at communicating the necessity for a “give and take” on all sides.

## Places for community

If communal rooms are hardly used over a long period, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that they are not needed. The opposite is the case: communal rooms of “Sozialbau standard” are important for residents, even if they seldom or never use them. From a spatial point of view they are entrées which help to show that housing is more than just an isolated flat but also life in a community.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Notwithstanding ongoing documentation work about the housing estates on management and allocation level, it would make sense to maintain a structured monitoring system as a prophylactic measure. A broadening to a mix of indicators and a view of the profiles of different types of housing would provide an early warning system for developments and potential problems. Focused evaluations could then serve as periodic checks on the target concepts of the housing companies. This study has already shown an accumulation of negative statements about certain types of housing (according to size or age) or individual housing estates that should be looked into more deeply.

### ► *With new projects*

## Good building planning

Some points of criticism that were raised – such as disturbance through noise or a lack of cleanliness – are very quickly attributed to certain groups of residents, children very generally, migrant children in particular and of course teenagers. Looking more closely at individual housing estates, it can sometimes be seen that the disturbances leading to conflict can hardly be avoided due to the building planning – and one does not want to introduce restrictive provisions for use or even threaten sanctions. Numerous potential trouble spots due to badly thought-out planning were identified on visits – whether it be inadequate soundproofing or echo chambers, insufficiently robust materials, residual niches or rooms with incompatible uses next door to each other. In brief: the planning should be reviewed with a checklist for “social sustainability” to still better avoid potential sources of conflict.

## **The quality of the location and surroundings**

In order to maintain the high degree of satisfaction with the local neighbourhood, as found in the survey, for future larger housing estates and also allow neighbourhood residents to play a part in positive developments, non-profit housing companies should get themselves involved in urban quarter planning at an early stage.

Due to the high demand, housing construction, also by limited-profit companies, should continue in inner-city areas and not only on the periphery. Further building means densification, that is the policy remit. This also includes ethnically concentrated areas. Sozialbau and similar developers can play a key role here on the basis of their experience with interethnic housing.

## **The remit for integration**

The remit for integration can only be met if the development of the “mix-ratio” of Austrians and migrants on housing estates is kept under review. The discussion of a “tolerable mix” in the study “Living Together on Housing Estates” clearly made current limits palpable. It therefore falls to housing companies along with state policy to develop strategies to be sensitive to the foreseeable predominance of residents with a migration background. This applies to the first occupancy of future projects but also to new tenancies in the housing stock. It will be necessary to achieve a balance between older and newer housing so as not to leave the main part of integration work to the latter.