

Challenges in Social Housing

Technical, Sustainable and Social Aspects

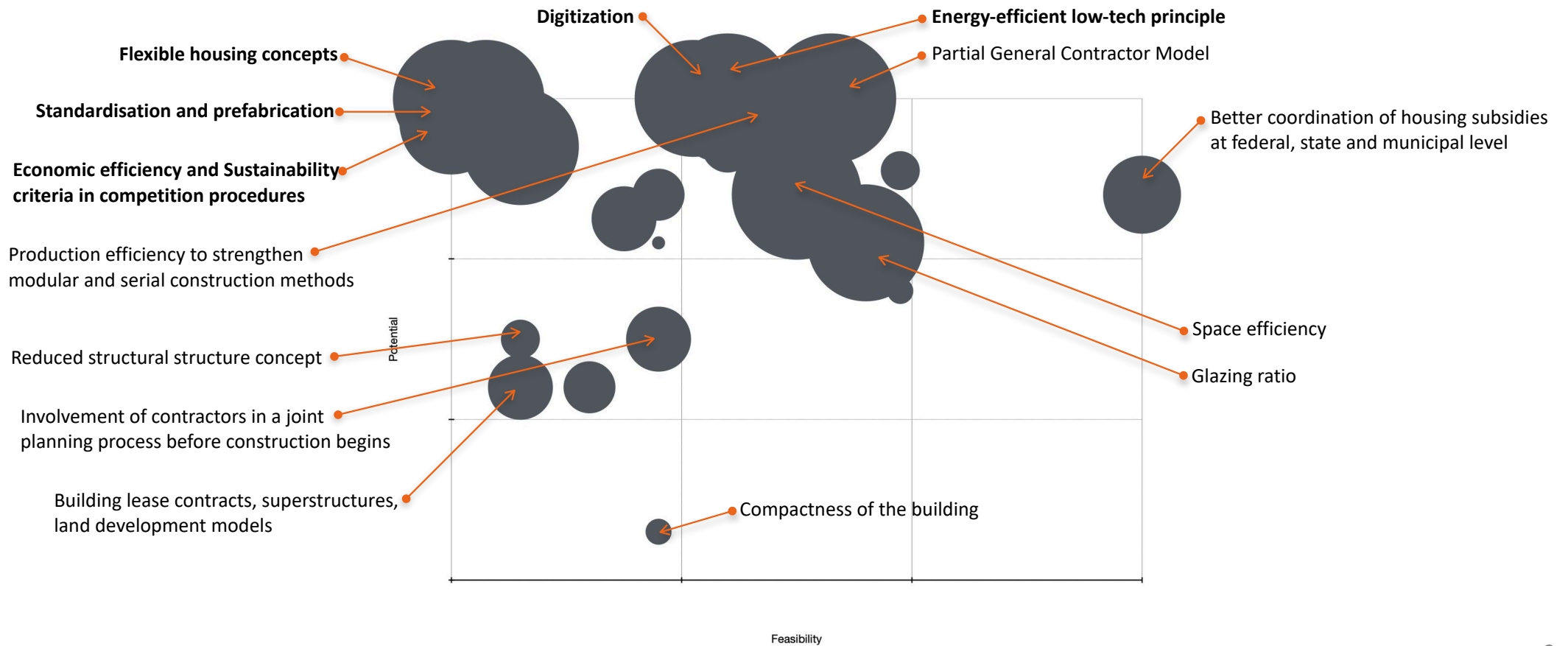
Thomas Mathoi & Karen Meixner @ CORP25, 15.04.2025



Initial Situation

- Social housing is important
 - 880,000 social housing units in Austria
 - 24% share of total housing stock
 - Contribution to social stability and sustainable urban development
- But social housing is not affordable anymore due to
 - Rising construction and land costs
 - Decline in building permits since 2021
 - Reduced construction output

Potential Analysis affordable (social) housing



Non-profit Housing vs. Social Housing



SOCIAL HOUSING

(Sozialer Wohnbau)

- **Developers:** Municipalities, states or private entities with public contracts
- **Legal Basis:** Regional housing laws and funding regulations
- **Rent:** Low-income households or vulnerable groups
- **Funding:** Strong public funding
- **Profit Handling:** No profit intention
- **Access:** Income and need-based eligibility
- **Goal:** Promote social integration and affordability

Image was created with ChatGPT

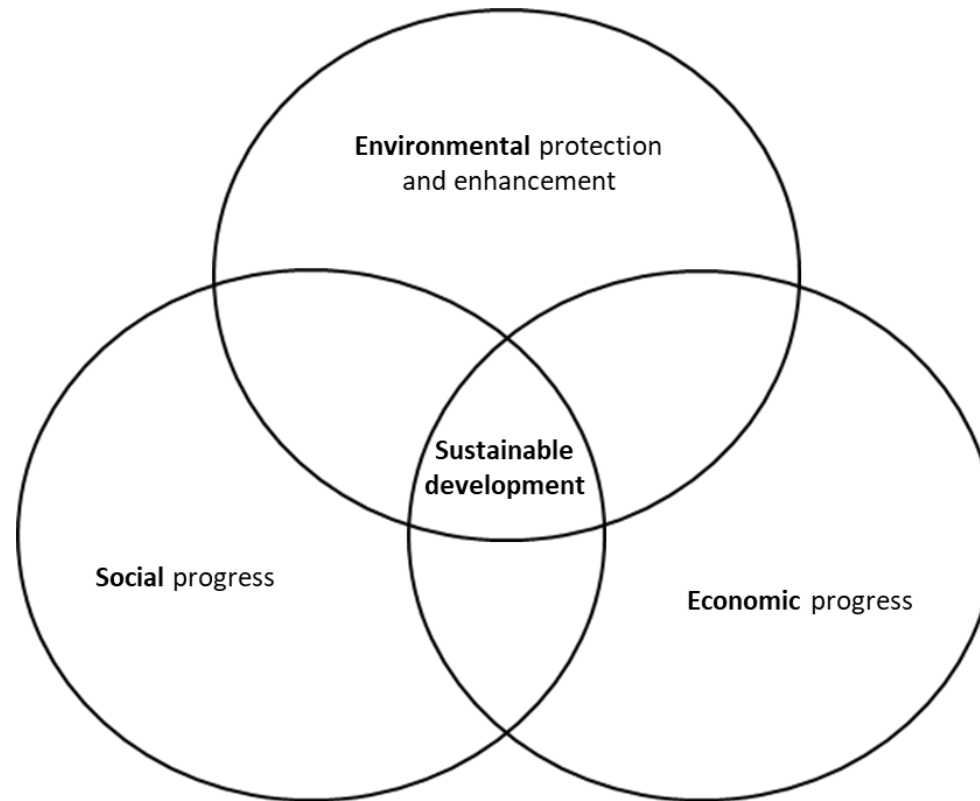


NON-PROFIT HOUSING

(Gemeinnütziger Wohnbau)

- **Developers:** Non-profit housing associations
- **Legal Basis:** Austrian Non-Profit Housing Act (WGG)
- **Target Group:** Broad sections of the population
- **Rent:** Cost-based (no profit margin)
- **Funding:** Often subsidized by public funds
- **Access:** Often included by public funds
- **Goal:** Often includes option to buy later

Sustainable Development



Elkington John (1994): Towards the Sustainable Corporation: Win-Win-Win Business Strategies for Sustainable Development. California Management Review, 36, 90-100.

Social Housing and Social Sustainability

- Definition of social sustainability in the context of housing
 - Long-term affordability, equity, quality of life, community building, and intergenerational justice.
- Importance of social housing beyond affordability
 - Social inclusion, community cohesion, integration of diverse populations, support for vulnerable groups (e.g., elderly, migrants, low-income families).

Current Social Challenges in Austrian Social Housing

- Increasing demand due to migration, demographic shifts (aging population), and urbanization.
- Segregation and socio-spatial polarization risks.
- Issues around integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees into local communities.
- Addressing intergenerational conflicts and needs through housing.

Intergenerational Challenges in Housing

- **Different Needs Across Generations**

Older adults, young families, and youth require diverse housing features (e.g. accessibility, flexibility, affordability).

- **Potential for Conflict**

Differing lifestyles, routines, and expectations can cause tension in shared spaces.

- **Housing as a Solution**

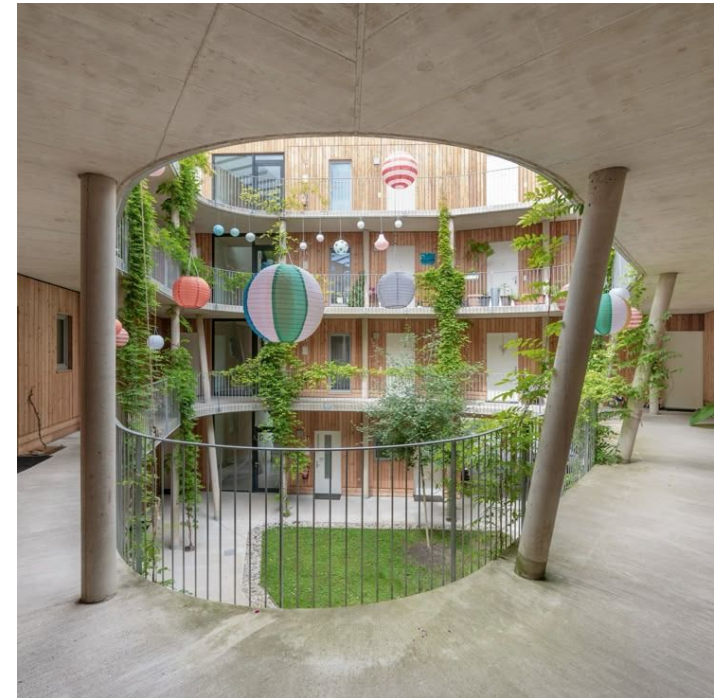
Intergenerational housing models promote interaction, mutual support, and shared use of communal spaces.

- **Programs** that connect generations (e.g. mentoring, childcare support)

- **Design Strategies**

Flexible, inclusive architectural designs

- Compact design (not too small and not too big)
- Efficient and flexible apartment layouts
- Communal spaces that foster social cohesion and shared resource utilization
 - community kitchen
 - library
 - fitness rooms
 - shared gardens or lounges



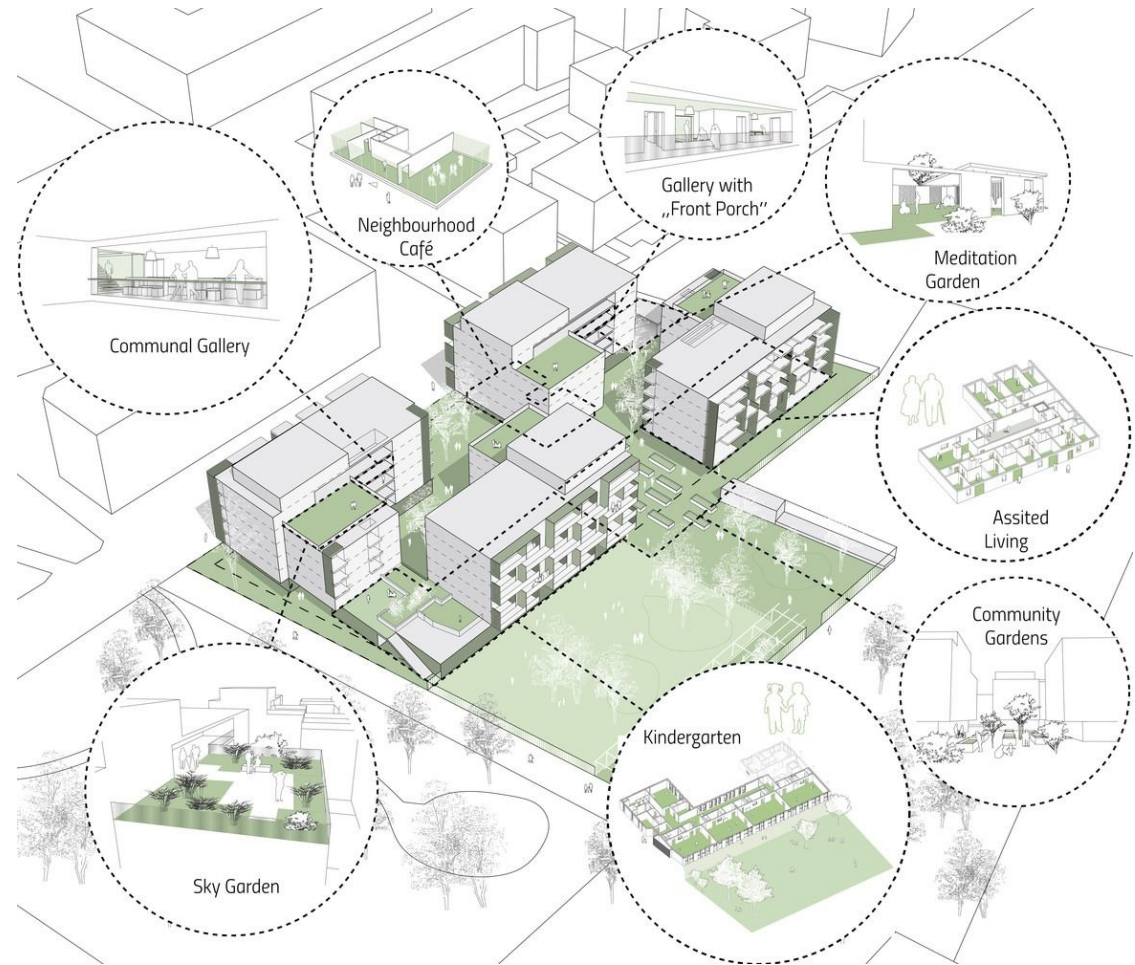
Source: Nussmüller Architekten ZT GmbH - Wohnbau in Holzbauweise, Max-Mell-Allee, Graz

STA | zwei+plus Vienna

- Intergenerational Housing
- by trans_city TC architects
- finished in 2018



Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/940835/sta-zwei-plus-plus-intergenerational-housing-trans-city-tc>



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Key Challenges in Integration & Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Social Housing

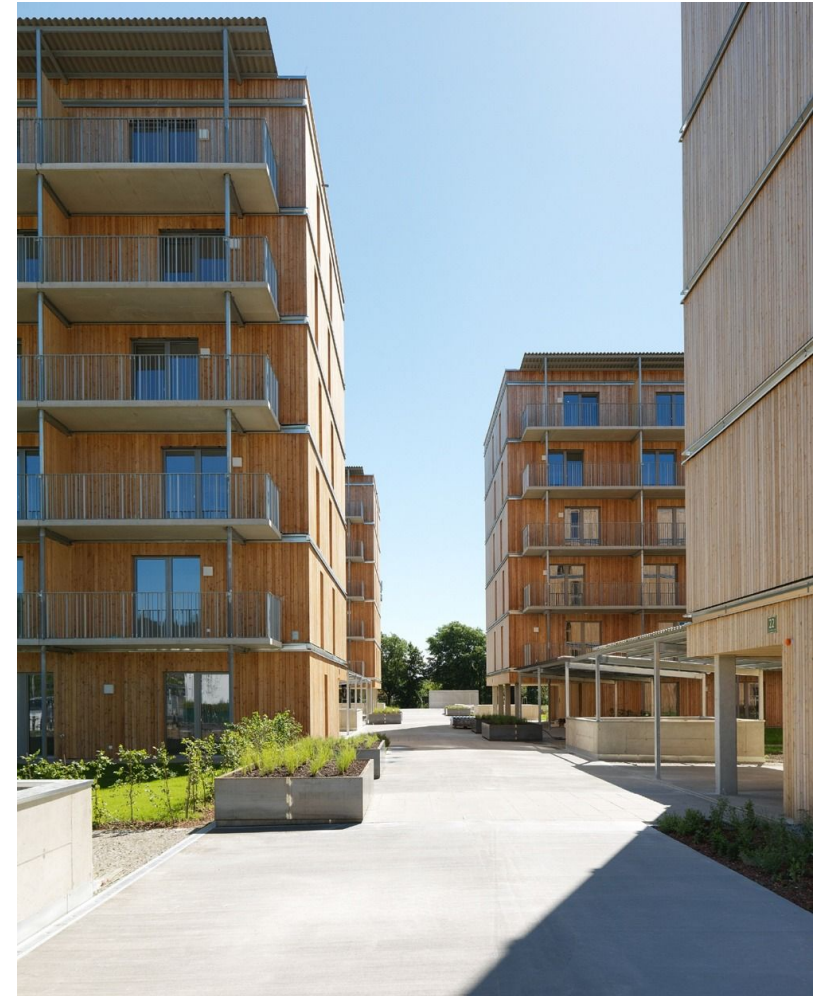
- **Access barriers**
Legal restrictions, language difficulties, and bureaucratic hurdles limit access to social housing.
- **Discrimination**
Refugees and migrants often face bias in the private rental market and informal exclusion even in public housing systems.
- **Segregation**
Risk of spatial clustering and isolation in certain neighborhoods—limits interaction with wider community.
- **Lack of tailored support**
Housing often not linked with services like counseling, language courses, or integration programs.

What Supports Inclusion?

- **Mixed housing models**
Promote diversity and avoid concentration of disadvantage.
- **Community-based initiatives**
Social work, intercultural mediation, and local projects can support participation and build trust.
- **Accessible information**
Multilingual guidance and simplified application processes improve housing access.
- **Inclusive urban planning**
Designing for connection—schools, transport, shared spaces nearby.

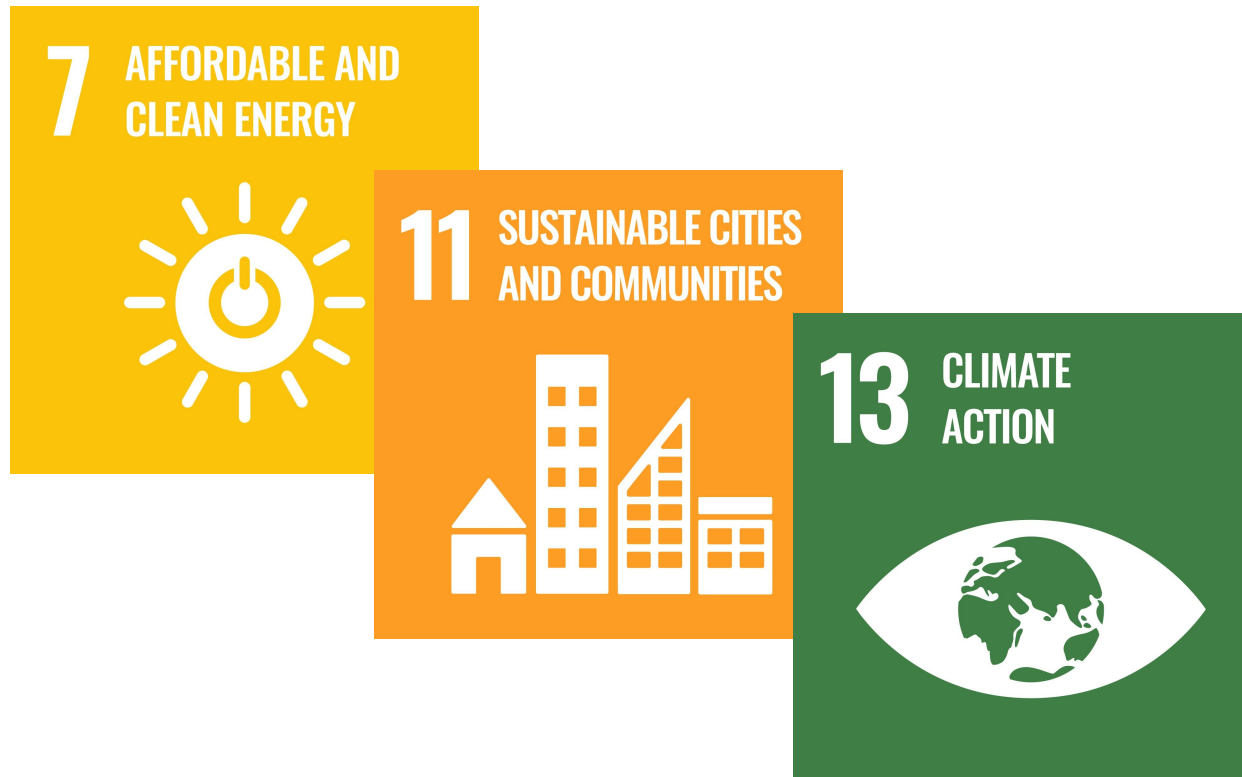
Social Housing @ Graz

- former Hummelkaserne
- by SPS architects
- finished in 2016
- first five-storey wooden residential building in Austria



Source: Paul Ott, New Social Housing in Graz-West, 2016

Sustainable Challenges in Social Housing

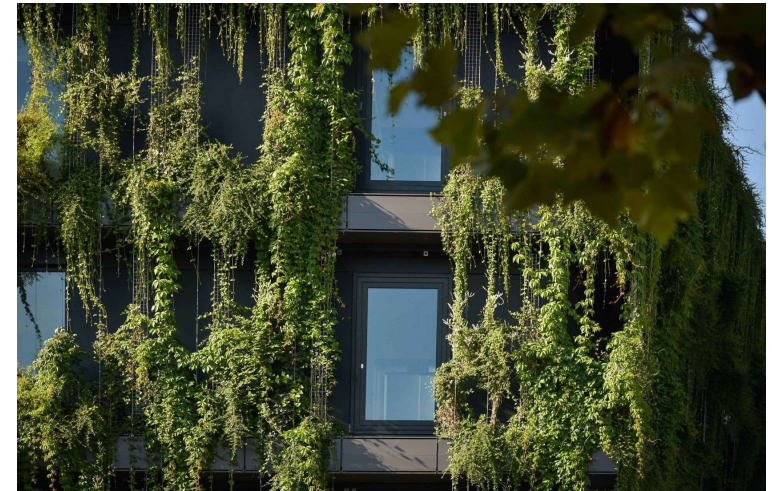


Smart, resilient, low-energy housing solutions

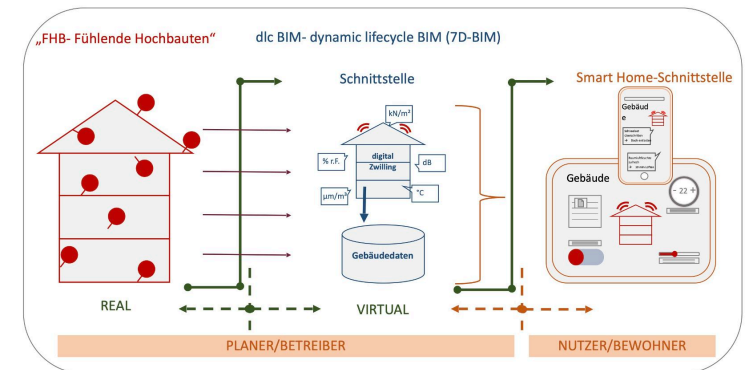
- Smart low tech over (too) smart high tech
- Standardized HVAC & MEP concepts and construction materials
- Digital models, building data and sensor driven maintenance strategies
- Accessible & low barrier user interfaces
- Green technologies & focus on repair and lifespan



Source: LineMetrics GmbH



Source: Stuttgarter Zeitung



Conclusion & Recommendations

- Critical situation: trend of reduced permits and construction output while demand increasing due to migration, urbanization and demographic shifts
- Urgent need for affordable and innovative social housing
- Early planning phase is key and should involve interdisciplinary teams including social workers
- Regular updates and reviews during and after the project to gain knowledge
- A **holistic and inclusive approach** is key to creating **sustainable housing models** that meet the needs of an increasingly **interconnected and diverse society**.