

Editorial

Housing heritage concerns us all—not only as shelter for living but also as places of belonging. The 20th century housing settlements in Europe and their more recent protection status provide a valuable opportunity to examine architectural concepts and heritage values, to look at practices of living, and to reflect on forms of ownership and participation. Following the conference “20th Century Housing Heritage in Europe: Conserving, Participating, and Adapting” (hosted at Technical University Vienna, 28–30 November 2024), this special issue presents new research insights that also add to our research project “Wohnen im Denkmal”. This three-year project (funded by the German Research Foundation, DFG) contributes to a fundamental understanding of the reciprocal processes of evaluation and appreciation of housing heritage. The perspectives of diverse actors and their access and participation in use and care, conservation, and design are systematically examined from the perspectives of both heritage conservation and housing research.

Conservationists and heritage researchers look at spaces, places, and objects with regard to where they come from—namely the past—, whereas urban planners are primarily concerned with where they might or should go in the future (and if planners are smart, they do so also by looking at where these places come from). Examining the history of places becomes all the more important as we need to learn to live with what is present, not only for cultural and historical reasons but also for ecological and economic ones. In the face of the climate crisis, resource scarcity, and economic challenges, we should not—and simply cannot afford to—meet our needs by tearing down and building new places; here, heritage perspectives that value existing assets are of eminent importance.

In this special issue, diverse aspects of this complex field are addressed through case studies ranging from Portugal to Romania, and Vienna to Wiesbaden. Ana Tostões adds to the discussion with her contribution in which she highlights how the social and architectural realms come together to empower heritage values in 21st century Lisbon. The urgent argument is: not enlarging our cities through ever-expanding urban

sprawl or greenfield development nor demolishing and discarding the materials and wealth embodied in our built environment. Instead, we need to learn to live with what we have inherited, adapt it to our needs as far as possible and likely also adapt our needs to what previous generations have bequeathed us as their heritage, and hence learn to value built structures and housing concepts. This contrasts the challenges facing Vienna’s neglected heritage of *Alte-Leute-Siedlungen*. Tracing the intangible values of this post-war social housing experiment, Christina Schraml demands action.

However, when it comes to the question of how to appreciate a housing settlement, conservationists might find an answer by looking at historical, artistic, and other cultural values. Inhabitants might find different answers and everyday solutions, as documented by Liliana Iuga, Irina Tulbure, and Oana Țiganea who examine Cold War housing heritage in the making in Ștei, Romania. The assessment of housing differs between those who use them and those involved in urban development (planners). Aristotelis Antoniou shows another multiplural perspective on heritage valuing where the modernist *Aspra Spitia* (Άσπρα Σπίτια) residential complex is at a juncture between becoming “historical” or “smart”. We also think about enlarging the catalogue of values to intangible aspects such as social and emotional ones: In this context, Federica Fava and Giovanni Caudo introduce European research and a case study of Rome’s *Vigne Nuove* public housing complex, investigating how cultural and natural heritage can foster emotionally healthy and resilient urban districts.

Discussing housing as heritage highlights its very specific nature: Housing is both a human right but often also a profit-generating asset. Dealing with this disparity from the perspective of a housing researcher *and* in terms of housing politics is difficult. It comes with harsh and strictly opposing societal interests that raise social and political conflicts; heritage and conservation interests introduce another layer and claim into this conflictual arena that needs to be balanced when trying to save people’s homes, keep them affordable, and adapt them to their needs.

To bring together these perspectives of theory and political practice, of conservation and housing supply, however, might indeed help us to seek the very best for the city as an entity: Conservationists might need to expand their values—from only bricks and mortar to the issues that people actually valued when living in these places and which they still partially retain as intangible values: the sense and infrastructure of community, affordability, open spaces, and much more. In turn, planners, owners, and tenants would need to accept that it is indeed the history and design of such places that create their special character and quality.

Valuing the layer of history might, however, be much easier when conservation opens up to adaptation, especially when it comes to urgent needs, for example in terms of accessibility or climate neutrality. There is a lot to think about with regard to these questions, and it is essential for the various professionals and interest groups to find ways and methods to weigh up and manage these claims, necessities, and changes. The introductory article by Heike Oevermann titled “20th Century Housing Heritage. Conserving, Adapting, Participating” provides some in-depth consideration of these challenges.

In this special issue, we also focus on the extent to which ownership and tenure imprint the way in which housing heritage is appropriated and ask how these factors can endanger or enhance heritage values. To briefly address a few of these issues: There is a threat of upgrading and gentrification, especially in places where housing is scarce or where heritage designation might enhance house prices—adding immaterial value and enabling social and cultural distinction for those who can afford to live in these very specific and distinct places. We see this happening in many large cities such as Berlin or Hamburg; and in Istanbul, Hande Tunç contrasts the divergent socio-economic trajectories of two affordable housing districts.

Conversely, where housing markets struggle for investment, vacancy rates increase as populations

shrink, or investment in building stock doesn't pay off, other questions predominate: How can we ensure that these buildings in their very structure are preserved as what they were? Simple maintenance and care can also become a challenge if a settlement becomes subject to speculation and changing ownership, as Natalie Heger and Ruth Schlögl's case study of the Red Tower (Rotes Hochhaus) in Wiesbaden shows.

While these questions point to the spatial context of the settlements, we also ask whether different owners handle these issues with differing levels of interest and care. And of what relevance is the heritage status to the people and institutions who really use settlements: as their home or place where they have shops or businesses, as real estate assets that can generate profit, or simply providing for those who need homes.

Examining these issues throughout our research project, we find an urgent need for greater knowledge about the actual relationship between questions of heritage and housing; of housing as heritage; and of tenure, ownership, and participation. This special issue represents a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the heritage/housing nexus, including its linked—yet often competing—priorities and stakeholder perspectives.

Acknowledgements

The conference and resulting proceedings built upon the intensive commitment of Luisa Omonsky, Lena Hecker, and Johann Gallis who are all involved in the research project (DFG, 511804015). Thanks also to Lasse Siemen (organization) and Dave Morris (proofreading). We extend special thanks to the Austrian Bundesdenkmalamt (BDA, Federal Monuments Authority Austria), the authority responsible for monument protection and preservation, for its cooperation and trust in the joint publication of this issue of the ÖZKD. Thanks to the BMKÖS and the Stadt Wien for their generous funding of the conference.