

Nachhaltig gute Wohnqualität

Sustainable good housing quality

Exemplary family houses in densely built-up areas

- English Abstract -

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Sustainable good housing quality

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In the study "Sustainable good housing quality" our task has been to document and to evaluate houses and housing estates which offer a high degree of housing quality. In addition, these housing estates had to do justice to the model of sustainability with regard to their design, technology, economy and ecology as well as in their social and spatial qualities. The focus of our survey was on rather densely built-up areas with terraced houses, modern courtyard houses and other similar housing forms. Our comparative analysis and evaluation of the examples, which implies the occupants' perspectives as well, are meant to sharpen our view of quality and to motivate further development of solutions of sustainable value. 24 examples of houses with one up to three floors have been chosen for our documentation and discussion. They represent interesting contributions to sustainable housing quality. Of course, one single outline could never meet all and everybody's requirements – that is why we will show well-designed solutions for particular situations, fields and details. Like this, we will be able to improve and to summarize our ideas about sustainable housing quality with each object under discussion.

Housing quality, housing value

Housing quality is a somewhat elusive term and it is almost impossible to find a generally accepted definition. Completely subjective criteria mix with ones that are generally valid and ascertainable in a more objective way. Housing quality corresponds to housing value, therefore when discussing housing value, it is impossible to separate "technical" from "subjective" or economic aspects.

Housing value is mostly about usefulness, above all it encompasses four aspects:

- < practical value or serviceability,
- < emotional value,
- < prestige,
- < protection of privacy and qualities of social environment.

Housing value in a broader sense is determined by:

- < organisational aspects (operation, administration, maintenance),
- < the residential area (quarter, neighbourhood, development of the area),
- < the location (place, landscape, infrastructure).

Sustainability

Sustainability always includes the idea of being economical – its primary aim is to achieve an optimal maintenance of desired qualities. Outputs and efforts of maintenance are to be improved. Ideally, sustainability implies stability and ability for regeneration. In the case of capital goods or consumer goods we can state that sustainability is their potential to preserve their value with a minimum of costs and effort.

In order to achieve sustainability we don't have to meet just some few conditions. The possible circumstances and requirements are particularly manifold and, in addition, they are very apt to change with time.

- < The housing value is based on many different "offers" which a house makes to its occupants,
- < to plan sustainable housing quality means to deal with the probability of changing claims on usage and housing needs. They might require considerable changes in and on the house.

Sustainable housing quality is achieved when new requirements can be met with a minimum of effort. In this regard there are three ways of reacting to changed requirements:

1. using the rooms for a different purpose,
2. changing the room structure,
3. leaving the house to other occupants.

A house for one's whole life should be built in a way that makes it adaptable to the development of family structures as well as to new and altering ways of life.

Social aspects of sustainable housing quality

– variability, individuality, community, neighbourhood, urbanity

Adaptability to changing needs in life, a tolerable social environment, and a balance between individual and common values all represent criteria of social housing quality. However, it cannot be realized in and on the house only, but presupposes an adequate housing environment and a corresponding situation in the overall urban context.

Family houses are expected to offer a high degree of privacy protection on the one hand. In everyday life, on the other hand, people also like to have places where they can come into contact with their neighbours. Moreover, the infrastructure of a quarter or a community is part of housing quality as well and it also assesses the stability of the houses' value over time. Finally, the long-term social usefulness considerably determines what will be economically sensible and ecologically sustainable in the long run.

Economic aspects

– concepts preserving stability of value and economical ways of living

To achieve an adaptation to new requirements without losing any housing quality, the core of the building's construction should not be damaged. If works on the building's

substance are not avoidable, they should not be massive or coarse and easily accomplished without affecting the current use too much.

A house can be used in an economical way if it is planned for:

- < everyday utility and casting a critical eye over costly marginal utility and features,
- < easy maintenance – enduring quality of constructions and material,
- < ecological use of energy,
- < flexible use of the rooms, variable building structure, easily adaptable technical systems.

If a house becomes a safe or even profitable financial investment depends, among other things, on sustainably low charging and on the stability of value. Somebody who thinks about its selling value while still planning the house, has to take into account other market forces as well, for example the important factor of "location" and, like a housing company, an appropriate group of customers which should not be too small, of course. It is always recommendable to keep in mind three ideas: first, variety in the sense of a flexible housing concept, second, variability of the building concept and third, possible change of the future level of demands.

Ecological Aspects – conserving our resources, living in a healthful way

Beyond individual goals, e.g. the client's original preferences, housebuilding should always involve a careful consideration of ecological aspects. This means at least to prevent strains on the environment, for example by saving energy, by protecting and conserving the grounds, water supply and other resources. Planning housing estates means protecting and regenerating the biosphere as well.

Decreasing the strain on our ecology and saving our resources is possible

- < during the building process,
- < while deciding about the plan and the construction of a building,
- < when conceiving the landscaping of the grounds,
- < during the current use,
- < at the end of a building's life cycle.

The ecological possibilities are manifold. However, people mainly invest only if it proves to be profitable to do so – especially because the financial scope is rather limited when building or buying an own house. That is why the clients' views of ecological and economic effects have to be reconciled, if they are to be realized generally.

Perspectives for further development

< Homes prepared for every eventuality:

Variable housing concepts taking into account possible changes in life are especially appreciated by inhabitants. Private building owners become more and more aware of future's imponderables as well.

< Room for individual and joint needs:

Individual housing which includes privacy protection – inside the house as well as outdoors – is one of the most important criteria when deciding about buying a home.

Outdoors this is guaranteed above all by a garden well-protected from view. Nevertheless, most people don't want to live in complete isolation but prefer to be integrated in their neighborhood – this requirement applies primarily to commonly owned or public spaces.

< **Living and working under the same roof:**

Modern communication and information media allow for and simplify working at home in many professional branches. This may take different forms: producing something at home, telework, self-employment with or without customers, part-time work or a permanent job, by oneself or with employees. Accordingly, the requirements on the premises differ enormously.

< **Building without barriers:**

Homes without any barriers offer various advantages to all their occupants and make everyday life easier. Ideally, a ground floor free of barriers can be used as a separate flat, e.g. for older people. Not all people want to live in multistory houses, in alternative they can choose houses with only one floor, which offer advanced possibilities for barrier-free living.

< **Taking part in the planning process:**

People buying an own house want to fulfil their personal lifestyle, beyond that a house always offers a chance for self-potrayal. Taking part in the planning of their new home is of great importance to the clients.

< **Mixing flats of different types and sizes:**

Mixing flats of different sizes and types in one neighbourhood creates social diversity and stability in the respective quarter. This may also contribute to a good relationship of old and young people, which is very important and which might become more precarious in the future.

< **Living in central locations:**

Families with children increasingly prefer centrally situated housing estates with good infrastructure. Adults as well as children profit from a housing environment where everything can be reached within walking distance.

< **Ecological optimisation:**

With regard to a responsible use of resources, life in a family house can be further optimized. Thereby, special emphasis is put on an ecological energy concept: reduction of heat supply and provision with regenerative energies. In addition, there are numerous measures, which decrease environmental pollution, conserve resources, and which are even free of charge.

Quote:

Weeber+Partner: "Nachhaltig gute Wohnqualität", Kurzbericht zum Forschungsvorhaben, Stuttgart 2003

The study "Sustainable good housing quality" has been sponsored by the Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau- und Wohnungswesen. The authors are solely responsible for the contents.

The main report contains 210 pages in German.

Content:

- < Housing qualities and criteria for sustainability in literature: introduction of evaluation systems and criteria.
- < What creates housing value? – Presentation of well-designed solutions for special situations, fields and details: zones and elements of the house and outdoor areas.
- < documentation of 24 exemplary family houses in densely built-up areas: chain houses, (almost) freestanding houses, semi-detached houses, modern courtyard houses, terraced houses, terraced houses with "adjacent houses".

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