

INTERNATIONAL CITIES FORUM 2024

“Ensuring adequate, safe and affordable housing as a municipal challenge”

DOCUMENTATION

Background

Creating adequate living space in cities and improving people's living conditions is an important municipal task and part of public service provision. According to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) all cities and municipalities have to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services (SDG 11). Therefore, this year's international cities forum focussed on the question, how cities can provide enough safe and affordable housing. Both, social aspects as well as challenges related to climate change mitigation and adaptation were discussed, based on several practical examples presented during the thematic workshop sessions.

Keynote speech

The event started with a keynote speech by **Prof. Dr. Rainer Wehrhahn**, Christian-Albrechts-University Kiel, providing a thematic overview on „*Housing justice - principles, challenges, policies* “. The focus was on presenting key theoretical concepts behind the terminology of housing justice as well as first recommendations from a scientific perspective. Beside others, Prof. Wehrhahn highlighted the importance of cities and municipalities as pro-active actors and decision-makers for ensuring an adequate availability of affordable housing. Starting from land acquisition for (future) housing projects to the provision of reliable support schemes for disadvantaged groups. In the end, housing is a matter of justice and key for social cohesion.

Dialogue talk

The keynote was followed by a moderated dialogue between **Dr. Ulf Kämper**, Mayor of Kiel (Germany) and **Aleksandra Kosiorek**, Mayor of Gdynia, (Poland)

The discussion was guided by questions regarding their key take-aways from the keynote speech with relevance for housing justice within the municipalities of Kiel and Gdynia respectively, including current challenges. Furthermore, the two Mayors discussed about their long-term visions for urban development and housing in Kiel and Gdynia as well as how to adapt to changing requirements to urban development and housing in line with climate change and social cohesion.

Here, both Mayors displayed their individual perspectives on how to adapt to the vastly changing preconditions for urban development in an appropriate manner. Aleksandra Kosiorek, who just

took over as the Mayor of Gdynia recently, provided some context on housing in her city. For decades the housing market was strongly dominated by private owners while the city played a rather small role in the provision of housing. However, her administration now wants to initiate some changes here to address the lack of affordable (social) housing.

Dr. Ulf Kämpfer gave an overview of the current challenges in housing policies in Kiel, including the issues of homelessness, public housing, the accommodation of refugees as well as aspects of sustainable urban development to tackle climate change and the transformation of energy systems. Both agreed that adequate and affordable housing are key for the attractiveness and socio-economic development of their cities. In the end, the ongoing socio-ecological transformation has to go hand in hand with efforts to solve current shortcomings in housing policies.

Workshop sessions

During the subsequent workshop session, comprised of two parallel workshops each with a specific thematic focus as well as two inputs on practical examples, the following aspects were tackled, discussed and can be summarized as follows:

Workshop 1: Challenges and instruments of municipal housing policy to create sufficient (social) housing

The workshop started with a short round of introductions to welcome all participants from Kiel, Brest, Coventry, Gdynia, Vaasa and Stralsund to the discussion.

Afterwards the first presentation was given by **Anja Währer** and **Svea Rohwer**, Department of Housing and Social Security, Kiel and focused on the topic of providing „Homeless assistance in the state capital of Kiel“. Here it was reported that Kiel has a total of 5,338 homeless people of which 4,330 are refugees. In general, it was reported that there is too little space for the number of people who are in need of housing. Currently there are about 400 people who need housing and who are not able to find a permanent accommodation. Notwithstanding that limitation, Kiel offers to every person in need of accommodation a place to stay, substituting the missing long-term options by renting hotel rooms every night.

The second presenter **Marie Bargmann** from the Department of City Planning, Kiel spoke with the title „Technical Naval School Kiel Wik. Conversion and joint building ventures: New ways to affordable housing?“ about converting areas with a formerly different function into shared living and community spaces. Opportunities arise when people who form building groups can share costs for community areas such as childcare facilities or recreational spaces and benefit from each other's knowledge. Challenges lie in pacifying all requirements, which are given by administration for larger areas in which many people live such as the minimum number of parking lots that have to be established by law.

The ensuing discussion then showed many shared concerns regarding the process of assuring safe, affordable, and ecological housing for all. Dominant was the issue of building cost, which in most cities caused a big limitation to what can be done. As the cost of construction is high due to expensive materials and lengthy processes, the final housing, which is put to the market in many cases, does no longer address vulnerable populations, since many of them cannot afford the

high prices with which they are put to the market. Solutions to this were discussed from two sides: lowering the cost of construction for example by speeding up processes and lowering standards as well as providing subsidized housing for those who cannot afford the commercially viable market price. Also rated as a strategically important factor was, to establish a housing first paradigm, which promotes an unconditional right to living – irrespective of having a stable job or fulfilling other criteria. It was further highlighted, that the topic of providing housing for all requires novel thinking for example by builders in creating modular units which can be produced cheaper and integrate new building standards more easily. It was as well emphasized that collaboration must be forged beyond the classical players by forming building groups and housing associations to bundle up the strengths of individuals for a shared common good.

Workshop 2: Housing in times of socio-environmental transformation

The workshop began with a brief round of introductions from participants representing different partner cities. This was followed by two presentations showcasing practical examples from Vaasa (Finland) and Kiel (Germany) and concluded with a dialogue based on the insights from the presentations.

The first presentation, "Innovative Housing for Ageing Europe," was delivered by **Anna Myllymäki**, an urban planner from Vaasa. She focused on the growing need for affordable and quality housing within an ageing society. Myllymäki introduced the Finnish social housing system with the ARA-funding scheme, which finances social housing projects in Finland. She highlighted the Wasahus project, a multifunctional space designed to cater to different age groups and abilities. Wasahus emphasizes collective living with a holistic approach to sustainable housing, promoting intergenerational interaction and community living.

The second practical example was presented by **Konstanze Meißner**, project manager Holtenau Ost, Kiel. Her presentation was called "Kiel's Future Quarter in the North. Achieving Visions", a development on the western shore of Kiel Fjord. The vision for this project is to create a space for collaborative action, cultural exchange, and innovation, with considerations for nature, culture, housing, and the economy.

She explained how the area, which had been used for military purposes for many decades, was opened to the public in 2013. The new development will be a space for living and economic activities. The development aims to optimize resource use and incorporate multifunctional buildings. Public participation is a key element of the planning process, ensuring that diverse stakeholder inputs are considered.

The workshop concluded with a dynamic dialogue session where participants discussed the ideas presented, shared their perspectives, and explored the potential for applying similar concepts in their respective cities or share their own practical examples. This interactive discussion underscored the importance of sustainable and inclusive housing solutions in times of socio-environmental transformation.

Panel discussion

The event was completed by a panel discussion with **Gerwin Stöcken**, Deputy Mayor for Social Affairs, Health, Housing and Sports, Kiel, **Sebastian Rehbach**, Deputy Managing Director of

Stadt Mission, Kiel, **Cédric Peinturier**, Director of the Department of Housing, Brest and **Vitalii Belobrov**, Deputy Mayor for Executive Affairs, Cherson.

Here, the panellists reflected again on some key topics and discussions throughout the day. Specific attention was given to the current situation and acute challenges in Cherson, due to the vast destruction of housing and urban infrastructure as a consequence of the Russian war on Ukraine. Here, some similarities to the Cities of Kiel and Brest were mentioned, as both cities also suffered from vast destruction during World War II. This offers the opportunity to share experiences and learning for reconstruction. In addition, nowadays approaches for modular construction were discussed as an adequate solution for the provision of affordable and sustainable housing.

Other aspects discussed during the panel focussed on the challenge of homelessness in line with the claim to create liveable cities for all. There was a wide consensus that the focus should lie not only on the aspect of construction, but more holistically on creating neighbourhoods as social systems. It was agreed that the Housing first approach provides a good base for the (re-)integration of deprived citizens. However, it is only a starting point and other social services have to go hand in hand here. Besides, the aspect of prevention is crucial, to prevent people of becoming homeless at all.

Ensuring adequate housing for all remains a key challenge within many cities and all participants agreed that municipalities have to play a crucial role here, even claiming the driver's seat for themselves. Especially in times of rising prices, new, effective solutions are needed to fulfil the multiple expectations on sustainable housing.