

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL COOPERATIVE HOUSING

Gemeinschaftliches, transformatives Bauen und Wohnen
Community-based, transformative building and living

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Efficiency and Sufficiency of Residential Space: How Much Room Does a Person Need? Community-based Approaches to Sustainable Use and Organization

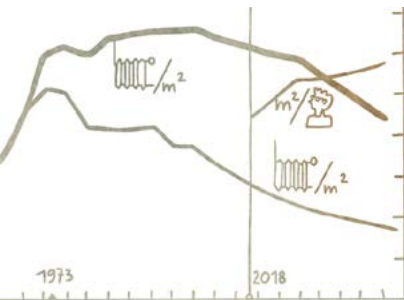


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Since the introduction of Germany's first Thermal Insulation Ordinance in the 1970s in response to the oil crisis, requirements for the energy performance of buildings have consistently increased.



Today, these are ruled by the German **Building Energy Act**, which is currently being amended. Despite this continuous tightening of regulations, the energy consumption in German housing has hardly decreased. The continuous increase in residential space per person is a significant reason for this. (Image 1)

But does this trend, as assumed in the majority of projections, really need to continue? Or is it possible, as is the case for energy **efficiency**, to develop a policy for energy **sufficiency** in the building sector that finally limits the growth in residential space per person?

The rise of single households is driving an increase in residential space consumption. People who live alone in an apartment or house use on average a substantially larger area than those in a household sharing a kitchen, hallways, bathrooms and other spaces. The cost of rent, energy and furniture can, of course, also be shared. Especially for young people, who during their education and the start of their careers have little income, this is now reason



enough to join together in shared apartments that enable them to live in a household outside the homes of their nuclear families. Benefits of shared housing lie not only in the reduced costs but also in the social togetherness. This aspect has in recent years garnered considerable interest in shared forms of housing among a range of population groups. This is prevalent among the elderly who live in homes that once were family-friendly but have now become a burden as household tasks and maintenance exceed physical capabilities. (Image 2)

A Need for New Construction or a Need for Optimization?

Community-oriented housing can contribute to an optimized use of residential space, from both social and ecological perspectives: (1) For people living in dwellings that are too large, community housing can provide relief and social integration, thereby (2) making a contribution to the fight against the prevailing housing shortage, especially in growing cities and regions, without (3) having to consume otherwise unbuilt land, which (4) also mitigates the energy and resource consumption associated with new residential construction. Collaborative housing can thus lead to reduced dwelling space per person and assist with social integration. This is, however, not automatically free of conflict: for example, the challenge of designing and planning common areas requires a certain willingness to compromise. Common spaces also require an organization of the associated use, cleaning and maintenance. Additionally, there are cases of cohousing projects that aren't space-saving because of the many additional community activities and rooms.

In order to exploit the potential benefits of community housing projects in terms of both space-saving and quality of living and housing, it is important to develop the necessary services and institutional conditions. The following are some examples:

- Support for networking and advisory centers, like in [Berlin](#), [Göttingen](#), [Tübingen](#), [Osnabrück](#), [Bonn](#) or [Cologne](#) (which even has two), for [finding](#) potential co-residents;
- [Provision of information](#);
- [Distribution](#) or allocation of appropriate and affordable land or buildings to relevant initiatives or groups.

Municipal housing companies can also be central players in supporting community housing. With these support services, relevant aspects or specifications for the space-saving development of housing projects can simultaneously be introduced. When applying an appropriate mix of “carrots and sticks”, that is, enabling and requiring measures, cohousing can become a significant component of sustainable urban transformation.

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