Chapter 2
Co-Housing in Austria as an Alternative Participatory Living Against Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Climate change necessitates innovative approaches to sustainable urban development. Conventional housing models often exacerbate environmental and social challenges through resource inefficiency, high carbon emissions, and social fragmentation. This chapter investigates collaborative housing (co-housing) as a sustainable alternative, emphasizing shared spaces, participatory governance, and ecological design. Focusing on case studies in Vienna and in Lower Austria, it analyzes how energy-efficient construction, renewable energy systems, and sustainable mobility reduce ecological footprints while enhancing social cohesion. Additionally, the chapter examines Vienna's progressive housing policies that facilitate co-housing through targeted subsidies and incentives. While challenges such as finance and scalability remain, co-housing offers significant potential for climate change mitigation and urban resilience, with transferable insights for global sustainability efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change, as a defining global challenge of the 21st century, demands innovative approaches to sustainable living and urban resilience. Traditional housing

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models often perpetuate resource inefficiency, social isolation, and high carbon footprints, exacerbating environmental and societal challenges. In response, co-housing has emerged as a participatory living model that combines private dwellings with shared spaces and cooperative management, fostering sustainability, community cohesion, and ecological stewardship. This chapter explores the potential of green co-housing projects as an alternative living model to mitigate climate change impacts, with a focus on exemplary initiatives in or near Vienna, Austria.

Co-housing originated as a grassroots movement emphasizing shared resources and democratic governance, offering residents a balance between privacy and community engagement. This model has gained traction in recent decades, aligning with global efforts to transition towards low-carbon, socially inclusive, and resilient urban environments. In Europe, and particularly in Austria, co-housing projects have evolved to integrate green certification standards, which enhance their environmental performance and contribute to national and regional climate goals. Vienna, the city with the highest quality of life in the world, recognized for its innovative housing policies and commitment to sustainability, provides a fertile ground for analyzing the interplay between co-housing and climate change mitigation with the support of City of Vienna.

The chapter begins by contextualizing co-housing within the broader framework of sustainable urban development. It traces its roots across Europe. The discussion underscores the principles of co-housing including collaborative decision-making, shared facilities, and asset pooling as vital mechanisms for reducing environmental footprints while fostering social capital. The integration of green certification systems, such as Passive House standards, LEED, or BREEAM, further elevates the environmental credentials of co-housing projects, ensuring adherence to energy efficiency, renewable energy use, and ecological building materials.

The analysis then shifts to Vienna and its surrounding regions, examining several green co-housing projects as case studies. Vienna's progressive housing policies, underpinned by subsidies and incentives for cooperative and ecological living arrangements, have catalyzed the development of innovative co-housing communities. Prominent examples include:

1. **Wohnprojekt Wien**: Located in Vienna's 20th district, this project epitomizes the synergy between co-housing and environmental sustainability. Certified under stringent ecological standards, Wohnprojekt Wien incorporates energy-efficient building design, solar energy systems, rainwater harvesting, and urban gardening spaces. The project's participatory governance structure empowers residents to collectively manage resources and maintain ecological best practices, reducing their overall carbon footprint.