

HOW TO SUPPORT AFFORDABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HOUSING? SET OF TOOLS APPLICABLE VIA STRATEGIC PLANS OF CITIES (1087)

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Abstract. This article presents the results of project “Affordable and Sustainable Housing in Strategic Settlement Planning”. The project researched how municipal strategic planning might be connected to housing policies and brought the set of 30 tools and actions supporting affordability and sustainability of housing at local level. When applied individually, none of the presented tools and actions solves the situation – they always need to be well combined, fit the conditions of individual cities, and create synergies. Even though the project focused on the Czech Republic, the developed list of tools and actions might be inspiring for other countries too.

Keywords: cities; affordable housing; strategic plans; tools supporting sustainability.

1. Introduction

Today, more people live in cities than in the countryside (approx. 75% in Europe), and housing remains the primary function of cities (approx. 75% of building permits in the Czech Republic). This situation increases the pressure on the conditions of living in cities. Housing is related to the social structure of inhabitants, lifestyle, culture, urban structure, public space, services, economic activities, health, mobility, and many other aspects of living. How people reside influences their quality of life, wellbeing, and health. Lack of suitable housing might cause problems such as homelessness, poverty, social conflicts, and other crises. Unfortunately, the last decade brought the rapid growth of demand on the real estate market accompanied with the decreasing number of free flats/houses and growing prices. As more and more people fail to find adequate places to live, the urge to redirect public policies on how to support the affordability of housing is increasing. Well-prepared housing policies became means to strengthen the competitiveness of individual cities as well as the social, cultural, and economic sustainability of societies.

This article presents the set of 30 tools and actions that might help to support affordability and sustainability of housing on the level of Czech cities and which can be implemented via strategic plans. Strategic plans as documents were chosen because they call for the integrated views of various actors, sectors, and levels and allow to build multi-level partnerships between city administration and civil society. In comparison to urban plans, strategic plans possess higher rate of flexibility, easier vocabularies, and less formal processes of cooperation; therefore, they are more opened to integrate diverse actors’ perspectives and offer suitable platform for creating

housing policies. In the text below, readers can find the table of 30 tools and actions and the brief guidelines on how to work with the list. The article is based on the results conducted during the project "Affordable and Sustainable Housing in Strategic Settlement Planning" supported by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (project no. TL01000143). The methodology of project included especially international literature review and the best practice examples across European cities.

2. Housing, markets and policies

Housing can be considered the basic human need and right as well as economic investment. Housing market reflects the wide scale of factors, such as the prices of houses/flats, maintenance costs, the availability of financial resources, the legal processes of building permits, country and individual locality, the legal system of owners' as well as tenants' rights, demography, cultural values, the rate of foreign investors, subjective preferences and expectations, social status and lifestyle, emotional attachments, and many others (e.g. Sunega, Mikeszová, Lux, 2009; Suhaida, et.al, 2011; Sunega, Lux, 2013; Ram, Needham, 2016; Deschermeier, Haas, Voigtländer, 2019; Hudeček, et.al, 2019; Duca, 2020; Pill, et.al, 2021; Mueller, Tighe, 2022; etc.). It is obvious that there are many factors significantly influencing the rising demand for housing, which makes housing unaffordable especially in locations with the high concentration of various forms of prosperity. Accordingly, the large variety of factors determines the variety of housing policies that are used by different countries and cities (e.g. Mulliner, Smallbone, Maliene, 2013; Žufan, 2016; Kraftová, Šmidová, 2017; Balmer, Gerber, 2018; Clegg, Farstad, 2019; Granath Hansson, 2019; Ryan-Collins, 2019; Wakely, 2019; Debrunner, Hartmann, 2020; Dobrucká et.al, 2020; Tsenkova, 2021; and others).

A brief history of housing policies in the Czech Republic was described by Kohout, Štěpánek, et.al. (2019, 2020b). After 1918, the young republic of Czechoslovakia managed the acute shortage of housing by the complex of legislation, fiscal actions, and organisational changes. Even though it failed to establish the equal distribution of support across the whole country, it well succeeded to coordinate and integrate the activities of state, municipalities, private sector, academic sector, and research institutions. During the Second World War, the German occupation ended some of the Czech independent policies, including the housing policy coordinated by the Ministry of Public Work (ministry coordinating economic life). Even though the era generally strengthened the principles of centralised planning (war economy), building sector was divided and spread across diverse resorts, departments, and institutions. Unfortunately, the situation never repaired to the previous complex unit and remained fragmented until today. After the war, there was the shortage of housing in big cities and industrial centres, while most border localities offered the surplus of free houses and flats. This might be one of reasons why communism era abandoned the approach of laws, financial aids, and coordination and turned to the central planning, state interventions, and citizens reallocation. Free housing market broke down, and the massive construction of

housing estates (block of flats) was supposed to provide the high standard of living for most citizens (especially in cities). The most common providers of new housing stock became cooperatives (flats) and individual people (houses).

Consequently, contemporary housing in the Czech Republic struggles not only from the points described in the first paragraph, but also from aspects that are specific for post-communist countries (see Kohout, Tichý, 2018; Kohout, Štěpánek, et.al., 2019; MMR, 2019; ČSÚ, 2021; Kohout, Molnárová, Dobrucká, 2021; Chudý, Molnárová, 2022; and others). First fundamental factor influencing today's situation is the privatisation of housing stock after 1990. On one hand, state owned too many facilities without appropriate resources to manage, maintain, and finance them, and privatisation helped to increase the effectivity of entire system. On the other hand, the scale of privatised stock was too large, and the prices for sold flats were too low. As a result, cities lost the significant amount of property as well as control over their own demographic and social development. Another consequence of privatisation is the phenomenon of "poor owners". Inhabitants (especially seniors in large cities) often live in houses and flats which exceed their regular income; therefore, properties cannot be effectively managed and maintained. Another factor is that the large percentage of Czech citizens live in housing estates, especially people with middle income. Housing estates represent from one quarter to one third of all housing stock in the Czech Republic and more than one half of flats. However, the contemporary condition of most housing estates is getting critical due to the aspects such as buildings at the edge of their life-span, monofunctional use, weak adaptability, the lack of social infrastructure, citizens' low identification with the locality, the absence of community life, and similar. Altogether, the Czech Republic faces the challenges of building the new modern housing stock as well as of renovating the huge amount of old but used flats. Unfortunately, the situation is further complicated due to the fragmented structure of owners. The fact that individual owners' rights are far superior to common interests makes the renovations and maintenance of buildings as well as public spaces extremely difficult.

If we look at housing as a system coordinated by public administration, such system should set up conditions, under which the economic and social environment allows citizens to have the economic freedom to obtain housing appropriate to their lifestyle and resources. Public sector is obliged to create, coordinate and manage such system; it means to determine the most important goals of such system, integrate the interests and roles of its actors, set rules governing the system, and define the administrative tools available to individual cities. As already mentioned, different countries and cities chose different housing policies to deal with the contemporary problems. In Europe, most of those policies follow the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (2015). It states that housing policies today should reflect the balanced principles of environmental adaptability, economic activity, social inclusion and cultural adequacy. In the Czech Republic, the strategic goals of housing policy are defined as affordability, stability, and quality (Czech Republic Housing Policy to 2020, Czech Republic Housing Policy 2021+). Nevertheless, the details of how to apply the given goals, and how to implement the state housing policy, are not agreed yet.

3. List of tools and actions supporting affordability and sustainability of housing

The Table 1 shows the list of 30 tools and actions which might help to support affordability and sustainability of housing on the level of Czech cities. The list is based on the project "Affordable and Sustainable Housing in Strategic Settlement Planning" (see Kohout et.al, 2020a, 2020b), which focused mainly on reviewing international literature and collecting the best practice examples across European cities.

Table 1. List of tools and actions supporting affordability and sustainability of housing in Czech cities

n	tools and actions	character	connection to chapters / process of strategic planning	availability	sustainability			management	connections to other tools/actions
					enviro	econ	socio		
1	Audit of the housing stock	administrative	analyses					X	2, 3, 5, 10, 13, 15, 16, 19, 28
2	Demographic study	administrative, planning	analyses			X		X	1, 3, 5, 8, 15, 29
3	Social study	social	analyses					X	1, 2, 6, 7, 11
4	Superior position of local housing policy in the strategic plan	political, planning	priorities supported	X				X	7, 8, 12, 16, 21, 28
5	Active housing policy	political, administrative	priorities supported	X				X	1, 2, 3, 4, 16, 21, 30
6	Implementation of social and demographic diversity policy (social mix)	social, regulatory	priorities supported	X		X		X	4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 24
7	Goodwill strategy / Strategy of good address	communicative	priorities supported	X				X	4, 9, 11, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25
8	Social housing	economic, planning	priorities supported	X		X			1, 2, 3, 15, 30
9	Revitalization of public spaces and extension of blue-green infrastructure	environmental, planning	priorities supported	X			X		7, 19, 20
10	Energy management of apartment buildings	environmental	priorities supported	X		X			1, 16, 19, 21, 25
11	Support for community activities	social	priorities supported			X	X		2, 3, 7
12	Regulation of business activities which do not support desired development	political, administrative	prevented activities			X	X		6, 13, 17, 18, 19, 28
13	Short-term use of municipal property	economic, administrative	implementation	X		X		X	11, 14, 15
14	Management of rents from the housing stock	economic, administrative	implementation	X		X		X	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13
15	Shared housing	political, administrative	implementation	X		X			2, 5, 8, 11, 25
16	Housing Development Fund	economic	implementation	X		X		X	1, 4, 12, 14, 21, 26, 27
17	Subsidies supporting the use of houses	economic	implementation	X		X		X	1, 7, 10, 16, 18, 27
18	Subsidies supporting the desired upgrades of used houses	economic, administrative	implementation			X		X	1, 7, 10, 16, 17, 27
19	Support of individual environmental measures in the municipality	environmental, economic	implementation		X			X	7, 9, 10
20	Architectural competitions (suppliers based on qualitative criteria)	administrative	implementation				X		7, 16, 21
21	Development company established by local government (public developer)	political, administrative	implementation					X	4, 8, 9, 16, 20, 24, 30
22	Private-Public-Partnership (PPP) projects	economic	implementation			X		X	4, 5, 23, 24, 30
23	Support of new legal forms of housing associations	political, legislative	implementation	X				X	5, 15, 17
24	Urban/Zoning plan with regulatory elements	planning	follow-up documents	X	X			X	4, 8, 9, 21, 30
25	Modification of building regulations	administrative	follow-up documents					X	11, 15
26	Taxation of foreign (or multiple) real estate investments	political	follow-up documents	X		X		X	4, 7, 21, 28
27	Restrictive taxation of unused empty apartment buildings	political	follow-up documents	X		X		X	1, 7, 12, 16
28	Regulation of tourism running on shared economy platforms	economic, political	follow-up documents	X		X		X	1, 7, 25, 26, 29
29	Increased protection of tenants' rights	legislative	follow-up documents	X				X	2, 3, 5, 12, 23, 28
30	Valorising the value of municipal land	political, administrative	other impact			X		X	4, 5, 8, 16, 21, 23, 24

Source: updated table of Kohout et al., 2020b, p.19).

The listed tools and actions are divided into six categories:

- political, legislative, and administrative (e.g. 21. establishing a public developer) reflect public interests, locally shared values, and political representatives' ideological roots. They might require political courage and will, which makes them difficult to implement yet very effective.
- social (e.g. 2. demographic study) reflect the need for social justice, cohesion, and sustainability. They help to clarify the shared frame of values and prevent deeper problems in the future.
- economic (e.g. 17. financial support to reconstruct old buildings) provide a set of supportive as well as restrictive financial tools, which are separated from municipal budgets.
- rooted in infrastructure and environment (e.g. 10. management of energies) reflect space as item increasing the quality of life and decreasing living costs and inequalities.
- dealing with planning system and processes (e.g. 4. strengthening the position of housing policies in strategic plans) are usually rooted in laws and methodologies, call for expertise, and connect housing policies to specific conditions of cities at hand. They are often regulative, connected to administrative and bureaucratic procedures.
- and based on reputation, marketing, and branding (e.g. 7. goodwill strategies) bring in soft aspects, such as political representatives, inhabitants, genius loci, perceived image, etc.

The proposed tools and actions are connected to strategic plans and/or the process of strategic planning, since they focus on the phases of

- analyses (e.g. 3. social study), which should consist of trends, data in mutual interactions, and potentials and limits of locality;
- setting priorities (e.g. 9. public space and green-blue infrastructure) and ensuring prevention (e.g. 12. regulation of potentially harmful activities) in the form of priorities, general rules and/or quantified indicators;
- implementation (e.g. 22. PPP projects) dealing with finances, organisation, rules etc.;
- other connected documents (e.g. 29. supporting tenants' rights) and other impacts (e.g. 30. valorising the value of municipal lands).

Special attention is paid to the diverse aspects of implementation, such as mandatory documents (e.g. 24. urban plans), financial aspects (e.g. 16. housing development fund), organisation (e.g. 21. public developer), cooperation (e.g. 22. PPP projects), and public support (e.g. 9. public space or 7. goodwill strategy). Successful implementation is heavily dependent on the quality of local managers, their abilities to cooperate and create synergies as well as to set up effective processes. Therefore, some tools and actions focus on managerial aspects, such as using architectural competitions (20.), establishing public developer (21.) or supporting new legal forms of housing associations (23.).

As for the way of how the proposed tools and actions work, the list consists of methodological tools (e.g. 1. audit of housing estate), regulative tools (e.g. 24. urban plans and their regulations), restrictive tools (e.g. 26. progressive taxes of more than one housing estate), as well as proactive tools (e.g. 16. creating funds for housing development). In terms of their impact, the listed tools

and actions influence all aspects of sustainability – environment (e.g. 19. support of environmental measures), economy (e.g. 10. energy management), and socio-cultural aspects (e.g. 17-18. support of desired design, upgrades and use of buildings). Affordability can be increased through the better management of existing housing stock (e.g. 13. short-term use of city property) as well as by developing the new one (e.g. 8. social housing).

Moreover, the list offers short-term perspective (e.g. 14. managing rents from the existing public real estate), mid-term perspective (e.g. 8. investments in social housing), long-term perspective (e.g. 6. strategy of diversity and social mix), and perspective requiring changes in national legislation first (e.g. 25. modifications in building regulations). Some of the listed tools and actions are fully manageable by individual cities today (e.g. 1-4. analyses or superior position of housing in strategic plans), whereas others require the change of political alignment (e.g. 6. implementing social mix or 12. regulation of business activities which do not support desired development) or even the revisions of state legislation (e.g. 23. new legal forms of housing associations or 25. modification of building regulations). Nevertheless, the majority of the proposed list is already in use abroad and could be implemented in the Czech cities within the relatively short period of time.

The last column of table n.1 presents interactions among individual tools and actions which help to create synergies and/or should be considered as a unit. For instance, active housing policy (5.) primarily reflects the attitude of city, its representatives and inhabitants towards active interventions on housing market. Externally, it manifests via new investments, privatisation vs. purchases, the existence (or absence) of building rules and regulations, the tolerance of speculative businesses, and similar aspects. Internally, it is rooted in shared local values, political maturity, the quality of local governance, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive and manage active housing policy in the context of possessed data (1-3. analyses), the clear declaration of interests and rules (4. superior position in strategic plan, 24. urban plan with regulations, 25. building regulations), specific actions (V8. social housing, 13. use of municipal property), and conditions for actions (16. housing development fund, 17-19. subsidies, 29. tenants' rights). Altogether, active housing policy (5.) provides the base for complex interactions between various tools and actions supporting the affordability and sustainability of housing. It also shows that synergies come from well-considered combinations.

4. Choices of tools and actions reflect specific needs of cities

It is obvious that the proposed list is wide and covers the different perspectives of housing. Nevertheless, none of the listed tools and activities brings results on its own, neither is there an ideal combination suitable for all cities. Some of the listed tools and actions might be considered universal across European cities, such as understanding the situation via analyses (1-3.), superior position of housing in strategic plans (4.) or extending blue-green infrastructure in public space

(9.). Yet, the majority of tools, actions, and their combinations should be considered in the context of particular cities and circumstances.

The first criterion about which tools and actions to choose is the size of cities and the level of their independence. Big cities with full governance competencies possess more opportunities than small cities belonging to others' jurisdictions. At the same time, however, it is more difficult to balance various interests, set up housing policies, and coordinate their implementation in big cities. Hence, the role of conceptual and regulative tools (e.g. 24. regulative urban plans or 25. modification of building regulations) is more fundamental in big cities. Also, big cities can combine the tools and actions for individual zones and settlements separately. For instance, historic centres might benefit from regulating shared platforms (e.g. AirBnB, 28.), whereas distanced neighbourhoods and suburbs might benefit from supporting such platforms. The combination of restricting and supporting various districts via the same tool benefits the city as a whole by redistributing tourists, sustaining housing in centres and supporting economy in localities which would otherwise be omitted.

Second aspect is the localisation of particular city and its development situation. Rising cities need different housing policy than shrinking cities; a city located close to a capital has different dynamics from a city located in a structurally deprived region. Cities facing rapid development and strong investment pressures need clear rules and regulations (e.g. 12. regulation of business activities, 24. Regulative urban plans or 25. Modification of building regulations). The suburbs of capitals serving mainly for "sleeping" might benefit from stronger local community and services (11. supporting community activities). The widest impact and synergies of direct subsidies (17-18.) could be seen in cities which face shrinking and degradation. Managing rents (14.) is useful especially in cities which lack housing stock or where prices rise too rapidly compared to the rise of salaries. Cities with empty buildings might increase taxes in case when investors benefit from owning buildings rather than renting them, but should carefully ponder doing so if abandoned buildings result from people leaving the region.

5. Conclusion

Due to the increasing problems with the affordability and sustainability of housing in many European cities, housing policies are becoming one of the key municipal agendas. In the Czech Republic, however, the agreed housing policy lacks details of how to implement the stated strategic goals. This article introduced the list of 30 tools and actions which might support affordability and sustainability of housing via strategic plans of cities. They cover the wide scale of aspects, such as:

- laws, administration, communication, politics, economy, social factors, etc.
- the different chapters of strategic plans /phases of planning;

- the factors of implementing and managing the development of housing stock, e.g. finances, organisation, cooperation, legal forms, etc.
- impact on all three pillars of sustainability;
- immediate applicability by individual cities as well as the long-term perspective of structural changes.

Strategic plans were considered the suitable platform for creating housing policies because they are well established documents and, at the same time, less formal, more opened and flexible, and easier to be understood by various actors than urban plans. Even though the introduced list of tools and actions was developed according to the needs of the Czech Republic, it might be inspiring for other countries too.

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