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# Working Paper Strategies of Capital Accumulation in Times of Land Scarcity. A Field Perspective on Social Housing Construction in Vienna

SPACE Working Paper Series, No. 9

**Provided in Cooperation with:** Johannes Kepler University Linz, Institute for Comprehensive Analysis of the Economy (ICAE)

*Suggested Citation:* Altreiter, Carina; Litschauer, Katharina (2021) : Strategies of Capital Accumulation in Times of Land Scarcity. A Field Perspective on Social Housing Construction in Vienna, SPACE Working Paper Series, No. 9, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Research Project SPACE - Spatial Competition and Economic Policies, Linz

This Version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/10419/301080

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# **SPACE Working Paper Series**

Working Paper No. 9 (August 2021)

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# Strategies of Capital Accumulation in Times of Land Scarcity. A Field Perspective on Social Housing Construction in Vienna.

Carina Altreiter\* and Katharina Litschauer

August 11 2021

#### Abstract

The social housing market in Vienna is known for its large, decommodified housing stock and therefore has been subject to extensive research. However, current approaches lack a nuanced account of the main producers of social housing today, namely limited-profit housing associations. Following Bourdieu, this paper applies a field perspective to grasp the configuration and distribution of different capital forms within the social housing market. It explores how field positions influence possibilities for acquiring building plots, something that has become increasingly difficult in recent years due to rising market prices and increasing competition for land distributed by the municipality of Vienna via 'developer competition' proceedings. Drawing on multiple correspondence analysis and qualitative interviews, the article shows that despite economic capital remaining a pivotal currency in the field, the involvement of the municipality adds more weight to specific forms of cultural and social capital compared to economic capital.

Keywords: social housing market; scarcity; field theory; cultural capital; capital accumulation

JEL: L1; L32; R31

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# 1 Introduction

In recent years, prices for land have been rising consistently in Vienna, putting pressure on the construction of affordable social housing (Kadi et al., 2021). It has always been on the city government agenda to mitigate developments on the private land market by buying and developing land itself. After the municipality gradually withdrew from its construction activities in the 1990s, the construction of new social housing was predominantly left to limited-profit housing associations (LPHAs), which are well-established housing developers in Austria. This has made them the main supplier of social housing in the city today. LPHAs access land and financing for new construction via both the market and the municipality. However, rising land prices have confounded this established structure. Current market prices for building plots are not compatible with public funding requirements, as they limit the eligible costs for land acquisition. Yet, public funding is an indispensable part of LPHAs' financial resources. At the same time, the scarcity of suitable land for publicly subsidized housing in the market has made more LPHAs dependent on governmental land distribution policies. Before the 1990s, the common practice for distributing land was according to the political affiliations and size of different associations. In 1995, the city introduced a competitive tenure procedure (Bauträgerwettbewerbe, eng. 'developer competition, or 'DC') with the aim of objectifying the distribution, as well as to increase the quality of buildings (Amann, 1999). This instrument provides affordable building plots and demands certain housing quality in return. Recently, more and more LPHAs have entered into DCs to compete for land and funding, which, as a result, diminishes their individual chances of success.

The entanglement of the private housing market and the social (rental) market in its various forms has been subject to extensive research (Marquardt and Glaser, 2020). Regarding housing market outcomes, studies have highlighted the integrated nature of Vienna's rental market (Mundt and Amann, 2010), or outlined the state of social housing and current challenges (Mundt, 2018). Another strand of research focusing on housing policies has elaborated the institutional framework of the Viennese social housing market (Lévy-Vroelant and Reinprecht, 2014), outlined challenges for local governments and housing policies (Kadi et al., 2021) and analyzed how policy reforms impact housing conditions (Kadi, 2015). Common issues include the rise of neoliberal policies and tendencies of recommodification and marketization of the social housing sector, e.g. in the form of privatization or financialization (Heeg, 2013; Aalbers, 2016). These approaches, however, tend to generalize about the social housing sector and fail to address power relations between different agents involved. More specifically, current debates lack a nuanced picture of the companies responsible for producing social housing and the different strategies they apply in navigating recent market challenges and policy reforms. Against this background, the paper focuses on LPHAs as main developers of social housing construction in Vienna and applies a field perspective (Bourdieu, 2005b) to grasp the relational configurations of LPHAs in the social housing market and how they deal with increasing competition in the access for land.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, which combines multiple-correspondence analysis with qualitative interviews with LPHA representatives, the paper explores a) the dominant capital forms that govern the field of social housing construction and how those assets are distributed within the field. It then explores b) how strategies for dealing with increasing competition and scarcity of land are structured by their respective field position.

The article first gives a brief overview of the main characteristics of the social housing market in Vienna (2). The third section introduces the concept of sociological field analysis and its relevance for analyzing markets (3). After laying out the methodological aspects of the study (4), the discussion of results regarding field positions and field strategies will follow (5). The analysis points to four distinct field positions as defined by the relative weight of economic, cultural, and social capital. Concluding with an overall discussion of the findings (6), the article highlights that economic as well as artistic tendencies characterize the market of social housing construction. Accordingly, power relations between market actors depend not only on financial assets, but also on innovative cultural capital. In this regard, the study makes an original contribution to existing research on social housing by advancing our understanding of market configurations and the way these are shaped by (local) state intervention.

# 2 Social Rental Housing Market in Vienna

Vienna has a long history of affordable housing policies dating back to the 1920s when the ruling Socialist Party launched extensive housing programs, providing large parts of the working population with affordable and quality housing. Up to this day, the provision of affordable housing is a key agenda of the city (STEP 2025, 2014). Following Kemeny's differentiation of social housing systems, Austria can be characterized as having a unitary market (Kemeny et al., 2001; Mundt and Amann, 2010). Contrary to 'dual rental markets,' where a sealed-off social housing sector targets only low-income households, in unitary rental markets, the nonprofit rental sector is in direct competition with the private rental market, often with rent-dampening effects (Mundt and Amann, 2010, p. 36). In Austria, the social housing sector plays a crucial role in the provision of overall housing and is open to broad swaths of the population. High income limits make almost 80 percent of the population eligible for limited-profit housing (Tsenkova, 2014). Roughly a quarter of Austria's residences (24%) can be attributed to the social housing sector, while in Vienna almost half of all main residences are in the social rental sector (43%) (Statistik Austria, 2019, p. 22). Contrary to other European countries, which have seen market liberalization and privatization of the social housing sector in the last decade, Vienna still owns a large municipality housing stock (Kadi, 2015). Hence, the social rental market comprises two segments: a) municipal rental housing (Gemeindewohnungen) and b) limited-profit rental housing managed by so-called limited-profit housing associations (LPHAs, Gemeinnützige Wohnbauträger) (Mundt, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Yet, since 2004, the city has refrained from further construction activity, leaving the construction of social housing predominantly to LPHAs.<sup>2</sup> This development significantly restructured the relationship between those two segments. Against the backdrop of an overall gain in size of the social rental stock compared to the private market since 1991 (from 53.6 to 56.8 percent in 2018), the share of municipal housing decreased by 5.4 percent during this period (37.4 to 29.0 percent) in Vienna. On

the contrary, LPHAs gained ground and increased their stock by 9.3 percent (16.2 to 27.8 percent) (Litschauer and Friesenecker, 2021).

#### 2.1 Limited-Profit Housing Associations

LPHAs are special organizational and legal constructs regulated by the Limited-Profit Housing Act (WGG). Following Mundt and Amann (2010, p. 38), key characteristics are: first, control of organization through an umbrella organization (GBV) and supervision through local governments. Second is the cost coverage principle (Kostendeckungsprinzip), which means that rents (and also selling prices) cover only incurred construction and land acquisition costs. In combination with rent caps as defined by subsidy schemes, this guarantees lower rents compared to the private housing market. The third characteristic is a clearly demarcated business area limited to housing construction and related activities, such as refurbishment and management of housing stock. The fourth is an obligation to build - an exemption for this obligation requires the approval of the federal state government. Fifth, revenues and profits have to be reinvested in purchasing land or construction and refurbishment activity, and only a limited amount of the annual surplus (3.5%) can be distributed to shareholders or owners.

The majority of the currently registered LPHAs in Vienna were founded in the interwar period (33%) or shortly after the Second World War (55%). However, they differ substantially regarding their forms of organization, their resources, and market activity. Indicators presented below (*Table 1*) highlight the heterogeneity of the social housing market in Vienna.

LPHAs can either be organized as cooperatives (Genosssenschaft) or as limited liability corporations (Aktiengesellschaft or Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung). Out of the 60 registered LPHAs in Vienna, 58% are cooperatives and 42% are corporations. Cooperatives are controlled by their members, whereas corporations are owned by financial institutions, insurance companies, foundations, charities and religious organizations, companies, public bodies, and social partner organizations (e.g trade unions).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Despite rents being comparable between the two segments, limited-profit housing requires down payments, which are returned to tenants when they move out (deducted by 1 percent per year), posing an access barrier for low-income households (Litschauer and Friesenecker, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Although the city has recently relaunched its building activities, only a very limited number of units have been built.

|                       | Total assets<br>(EUR) | Employees | Housing stock<br>(units) | New construc-<br>tions (2017) | Undeveloped prop-<br>erties (EUR) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| N [NA]                | 60 [2]                | 60 [2]    | 60 [4]                   | 60 [6]                        | 60 [2]                            |
| Minimum               | 0.22 M                | 0         | 54                       | 0                             | 0                                 |
| Maximum               | 1.627 M               | 420       | 51,707                   | 561                           | 128 M                             |
| Mean                  | 340 M                 | 53        | 6,207                    | 74                            | 12 M                              |
| Median                | 196 M                 | 15        | 2,593                    | 0                             | 3 M                               |
| Standard<br>deviation | 393 M                 | 82        | 8,911                    | 125                           | 23 M                              |
| Total                 | 20 Bn.                | 3,088     | 347,604                  | 4,017                         | 673 M                             |

Table 1 Limited-profit housing associations in Vienna

Sources: Audit reports of the City of Vienna [Prüfberichte] (2016-2019); Company-register directory [Firmenbuchauszug].

Cooperatives operate in a much more geographically restricted manner than corporations, with 40% operating only in individual Viennese districts, 37% Vienna wide and only 23% operating beyond Vienna. On the contrary, only 8% of corporations limit their business activities to certain Viennese districts, while 48% operate in the whole city and 44% also construct in other parts of Austria. Although some cooperatives are large companies, overall the corporations tend to be bigger, with more employees, higher total assets, and a larger housing stock.

### 2.2 Allocation and Distribution of City-Owned Land for Social Housing

The construction of new housing is a process of capital circulation and accumulation (Aalbers and Christophers, 2014; Belina, 2017). It requires land and financial capital, which can be accessed either via the private market or via the municipality.

The city of Vienna predominantly supports social housing via so-called 'object-side subsidies' (Amann and Mundt, 2005), which means that it subsidizes the construction side of housing by providing land and public loans with low interest. In this regard, the municipality and LPHAs form a symbiotic relationship. LPHAs have access to secure financing, which makes them less dependent on the volatile capital market and equity reserves. Although subsidies do not cover all costs, for most LPHAs they are an indispensable part of financing.<sup>3</sup> The city, on the other hand, can thus fulfil its objective to provide its population with affordable housing as public subsidies ensure a steady level of construction. At the same time, the municipality can also shape certain aspects of housing production through regulations attached to these subsidies. The construction of social housing using public money, for instance, binds LPHAs to a statutory framework that limits the amount for which they can purchase land (currently 188 EUR/m<sup>2</sup> of gross overground floor area). Rocketing prices for building plots on the private market have made it difficult to find suitable offers. Since 2015, average costs for building plots have increased from  $608 \in$ to  $912 \in$  in Vienna, with sizable variations between the different districts (Statistik Austria, 2020).

Moreover, competition from the profit sector has increased over the last several years. Before 2010, commercial developers only played a marginal role, leaving LPHAs as the main developers in Vienna. Since then they increased their construction volume significantly, while social housing construction capacities remained rather stable over the years. Thus, commercial developers became a serious competitor for building plots (see *Figure 1*), hence, increasing prices and further intensifying land scarcity.

Under current circumstances, LPHAs cannot acquire building plots in the market if they want to take advantage of housing subsidies. Unless they own land (re-)dedicated for construction, the only possibility to gain access to construction opportunities is via so-called 'developer competitions' (DC). These tenders are organized by *wohnfonds\_wien* [Housing Fund Vienna], which is responsible for providing sufficient building plots for social housing. It buys and develops land that is later sold or leased to developers for the construction of (social) housing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Public loans usually account for one quarter to half of the financing costs (GBV 2016, p. 91).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>In 2019, *wohnfonds\_wien* owned 3.2 million m<sup>2</sup> of land (*wohnfonds\_wien*, 2020, p. 49), about 0.8% of Vienna's total urban area or 2.2% of the area dedicated as building land (Gutheil-Knopp-Kirchwald and Getzner, 2012).

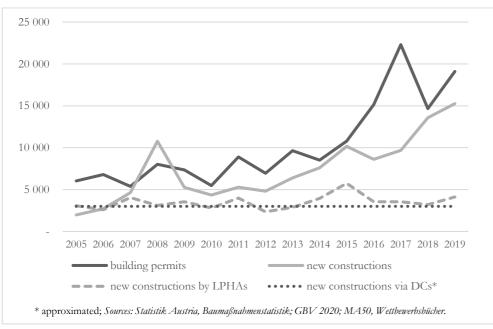


Figure 1: Housing construction in Vienna, 2005-2019

All building plots owned by *wohnfonds\_wien* and all other buildings plots covering more than 500 housing units constructed with subsidies require a competitive tender. Introduced in 1995, the aim of DCs is to secure the provision of high-quality subsidized housing whilst ensuring affordability for residents. Both LPHAs and commercial developers are entitled to take part in these competitions and have to team up with architects to submit a project. A multi-disciplinary jury assesses projects along the criteria of economy, architecture, ecology and (since 2009) social sustainability, and awards the best projects with building plots and housing subsidies. Around 3,000 housing units are awarded via this DC instrument every year (12 projects with a total of 2,600 housing units in 2019, see wohnfonds\_wien (2020)). As shown above, limited-profit housing associations are heterogeneous actors and differ in their assets and resources. Accordingly, market strategies differ with regard to new constructions, and to gaining access to building plots. In order to develop an understanding of market configurations and related strategies of capital accumulation, a field perspective allows for a nuanced picture of underlying power relations and elaboration on market positions and accumulation strategies.

# 3 Theoretical Context – A Field Perspective on Markets

In this study, a field approach was used for looking at the social housing market in Vienna. Picturing (specific) markets as social fields is well established in current debates of economic sociology (e.g. Fligstein, 2018; Balsiger 2019; Beckert 2011). Why does a field approach seem valuable, particularly for the analysis of markets? As Jens Beckert argues, the 'surplus' of field theory lies in its ability to combine and explore the interrelationship of different social forces that shape economic practices such as 'social networks, institutions and cognitive frames' (Beckert, 2010, p. 605), which traditionally have informed different (and sometimes contradictory) approaches in new economic sociology. Specifically, this perspective 'shifts[s] the emphasis in the analysis of markets from the act of exchange to these structuring forces' (ibid, p. 609).

The field perspective was introduced by Bourdieu, who developed a specific understanding of the social world as a 'multi-dimensional space of positions' (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724), where agents are distributed within the space according to their overall possession and configuration of capital. Bourdieu's approach has received different interpretations, applications, and theoretical advances - such as in organizational studies (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) or social network analysis (Nooy, 2003). In the following, the discussion is limited to Bourdieu and approaches close to this tradition such as Fligstein, Schmidt-Wellenburg, or Lebaron as they specifically deal with markets as fields, which best meets the research interests pursued in the study. What they have in common is an understanding of markets as socially constructed arenas that are not only shaped by specific institutional settings, but also cognitive meanings of agents. Moreover, they share a spatial and relational understanding of social interaction (Kluttz and Fligstein, 2016).

Following Bourdieu, fields can be defined as 'relatively autonomous social microcosms' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97) within the larger social space, which follows a particular logic of practice and meanings and therefore is characterized by a certain amount of autonomy. It is a 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions' (ibid). The structure of relations between agents (power relations) is determined by the distribution of the resources of power (dominant forms of capital) within the field. Apart from economic capital (money, property, financial assets), knowhow and expertise (cultural and technological capital), juridical capital and organizational capital, sales and marketing capacities (commercial capital), social capital (access to different forms of assets through networks and cooperation), and symbolic capital are also essential in defining field positions and power relations (Bourdieu, 2005a, p. 194f.).

Fields are 'fields of struggles' (Bourdieu, 2005a, p. 199), in which 'agents equipped with different resources confront each other in order to gain access to exchange and to preserve or transform the currently prevailing relation of force' (ibid). The strategies agents develop and apply in these competitive struggles - and the constraints and possibilities they face - depend on their position within the field that equals their overall stock (volume) and configuration of capital. A market can therefore be pictured as the 'totality of relations of exchange between competing agents' (Bourdieu, 2005b, p. 205). In several studies, Bourdieu explored these struggles for different economic subfields, e.g. the field of housing production (1998) or the field of publishers (2008), to name just a few. Dominant agents ('incumbents') try to influence activities in the field in a way that secures their capital stock and eventually reproduces their position within the field. Agents with the largest capital stock define the 'regularities and sometimes the rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 2005a, p. 76). Dominated agents, on the other hand, either accept the state of capital distribution or actively challenge dominant actors. The notion of field allows for seeing those differences as well as how firms are connected with each other in relations of 'complementarity-in-rivalry,' as Bourdieu

puts it (2005b, p. 40). Within fields, agents not only struggle over the acquisition of different forms of capital but also over incumbent and legitimate meanings within the field which structure agents' perception of themselves and others (Bourdieu, 2005b; Diaz-Bone, 2012).

With their 'theory of strategic action fields,' Fligstein and McAdam (2012) have most prominently further developed Bourdieu's field perspective in researching markets; however, they put more emphasis on interaction and on changes within a particular field. Critics have argued that this advancement introduces elements of symbolic interactionism to field theory, of which Bourdieu himself was very critical (Dederichs and Florian, 2002; Suckert, 2017, p. 416). In an interview, Frédéric Lebaron acknowledges Fligstein's and McAdam's contribution to field theory, but is critical of their extension of the original model bearing the risk of 'losing relevance and of giving birth to a very relaxed use of the word "field" (Schmitz, 2018). Fligstein and McAdam, however, counter by arguing that their approach gives more priority to dynamics within markets (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p. 10). The basic mechanism in markets is a search for stability, as companies attempt to avoid price competition and aim to stabilize their market position. For this work, this approach is a valuable supplement to Bourdieu, as it calls our attention to heterogeneous competitive and cooperative strategies in order to gain or maintain power.

Now turning to the case of social housing in Vienna, the relational perspective proposed by the field approach allows for analyzing the importance and relationship of different forms of capital within a field and how the distribution and access to these resources structure market relations and field positions. Moreover, the field perspective enables us to relate objective market positions with specific company strategies and to explore how strategies for capital accumulation relate to the field position and capital possession of LPHAs.

# 4 Methodology

In order to map the field of social housing construction in Vienna, a mixed-method approach was applied, combining geometric data analysis, in the form of multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), with qualitative interviews with representatives of LPHAs.<sup>5</sup> MCA offers a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> This complementary approach has also been applied by Bourdieu in his study on the French publishing field (2008).

spatial representation of field positions, while interviews deepen the interpretation of positions and respective strategies of capital accumulation. Hence, MCA is supplemented by a case-by-case analysis of individual companies and interviews with respondents from different LPHAs.

The analysis is structured following the steps outlined by Bourdieu (2005b, 2008), which have also been laid out in greater detail by Diaz-Bone (2012, p. 107). First, relevant indicators that capture the structure of power relations within the field were selected. Second, MCA makes the dominant power structures and oppositions within the field visible by exploring the 'inter-relations between many variables and categories in a data table and, simultaneously, reveal the proximities and distances between statistical individuals' (Schmidt-Wellenburg and Lebaron, 2018, p. 26). The third step encompasses the interpretation and analysis of field positions, which was supplemented by qualitative interviews to enhance data richness and improve validity. Fourth, the field structure is interpreted in light of (external) field dynamics (e.g. institutional regulations, economic developments, new challenges). Regarding the first step of selecting relevant indicators, the main question is which capital forms generate and therefore dominate the field. Building on Bourdieu's understanding of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, relevant forms of capital in the field under study have to be developed empirically. Drawing on different data sources<sup>6</sup>, eleven variables, divided into three groups, were chosen to illustrate the field of social housing construction. Table 2 summarizes the data set.

Table 2 Potential resources of power in the field of social housing construction

| Grouping                          | Variable                         | Modality name  | Categories $(n = 45)$   | Forms of capital                     |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Housing develop-<br>ment          | housing stock                    | stock: 1<br>stock: 2<br>stock: 3<br>stock: 4<br>stock: 5   | ≤ 1,000 units (8)<br>1,001 - 3,000 units (10)<br>3,001 - 7,000 units (11)<br>7,001 - 15,000 units (9)<br>> 15,000 units (7) | economic capital                     |
|                                   | undeveloped prop-<br>erty        | land: 1<br>land: 2<br>land: 3<br>land: 4<br>land: 5  | $\begin{array}{l} 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \\ -3 \\ 0 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0$                            | economic capital                     |
|                                   | new constructions<br>(2016-2019) | constructions: 1<br>constructions: 2<br>constructions: 3<br>constructions: 4<br>constructions: 5 | 0 units (6)<br>1 - 50 units (9)<br>51 - 200 units (10)<br>201 - 500 units (9)<br>> 500 units (11)                           | economic capital<br>cultural capital |
| Limited-profit<br>housing status  | legal status                     | legal: coop<br>legal: LLC  | cooperative (21)<br>limited liability company (24)  | social capital                       |
|                                   | ownership/control                | control: YES<br>control: NO  | independent (35)<br>owned by another LPHA (10)  | social capital                       |
|                                   | activity                         | activity: admin.<br>activity: developer<br>activity: subsidiary                                  | administrator (6)<br>developer (27)<br>operational subsidiary (12)  | (cultural capital)                   |
| Developer compe-<br>titions (DCs) | participation<br>(2005-2019)     | part.: 1<br>part.: 2<br>part.: 3<br>part.: 4<br>part.: 5   | 0 - 1 times (9)<br>2 - 5 times (7)<br>6 - 10 times (9)<br>11 - 25 times (12)<br>> 25 times (8)                              | economic capital<br>cultural capital |
|                                   | wins<br>(2005-2019)              | - [supplementary]<br>win: 1<br>win: 2<br>win: 3<br>win: 4<br>win: 5                              | no participation (5)         0 times (8) $1 - 2$ times (9) $3 - 4$ times (9) $5 - 9$ times (9)         > 9 times (5)        | cultural capital                     |
|                                   | success rate<br>(2005-2019)      | - [supplementary]<br>success: 1<br>success: 2<br>success: 3<br>success: 4                        | no participation (5)<br>0% (8)<br>0.001% - 22% (8)<br>22.001% - 39% (15)<br>> 39% (9)                                       | cultural capital                     |
|                                   | collaborations<br>(2005-2019)    | - [supplementary]<br>collab.: 1<br>collab.: 2<br>collab.: 3                                      | no participation (5)<br>< 10% (17)<br>10.01 - 40% (14)<br>> 40% (9)   | social capital                       |
|                                   | awards<br>(2005-2019)            | awards: YES<br>awards: NO<br>- [supplementary]   | yes (14)<br>no (18)<br><i>no wins (13)</i>  | symbolic capital                     |

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Data analysis is based on publicly available data for LPHAs. First, fiscal and organizational data was gathered via ORBIS (available company data by 31.12.2018) and audit reports of the city of Vienna (*Prüfberichte*) (2016-2019).

Missing data for five LPHAs was supplemented with data from the company-register directory (*Firmenbuchauszug*). Second, DC data was obtained via DC annual yearbooks (*Wettbewerbsbücher*) published by *wohnfonds\_wien*. These variables cover the relevant aspects and logics of social housing construction in Vienna and allow for depicting how opposing forms of capital implicate different field positions and strategies of capital accumulation.

The housing stock and undeveloped property indicators mainly represent economic capital, while the new constructions indicator depicts both economic and cultural capital. Similarly, as participation in DC requires both financial resources and technical knowhow (of innovative housing construction and procedural aspects of the tender procedure), this indicator also represents both economic and cultural capital. On the contrary, wins and the success rate capture cultural capital. The complexity of new constructions makes social capital also highly relevant. The collaborations in DC indicator captures this aspect. In addition, the indicators for legal status and of ownership/control also represent social capital. Furthermore, the awards received indicator represents prestige in the field and can therefore be interpreted as symbolic capital.

Additional variables, like number of employees or operational control, were used for the interpretation, but not included in the MCA as this would overestimate fiscal aspects.

Of the 60 limited-profit housing associations listed as based in Vienna<sup>7</sup>, 45 were included in the sample. There were two reasons for reducing the sample: (i) some do not provide housing, but rather allotment gardening or student residences, (ii) others constructed neither housing in the past few years, nor participated in DCs.

In a second step, based on the 11 categorical variables and the 45 cases, the MCA produces a multidimensional space that visualizes underlying power relations by identifying the relevant resources. The data was analyzed using a specific MCA, which allows for treating some modalities of variables as supplementary (passive). This allows for ignoring these modalities for the determination of distances and preserves the properties of the MCA. The passive modalities include the modality of 'no participation' in the variables of wins, collaborations, and success rate. Furthermore, the modality 'no wins' for the awards received variable was also treated as supplementary.

The first dimension covers 63.2% of the variance, the second dimension 18.9%, and the third only 7.5%.

Hence, the multi-dimensional space can be interpreted as a two-dimensional one without losing much explanatory strength (82% of total variance). The variables contributing most to the first dimension include undeveloped property, new constructions, and wins in DC and are hence related to the headings of 'housing development' and DCs The variables contributing most to the second dimensions include participation and wins in DCs, as well as ownership, and are therefore related to the headings of DCs and 'limited-profit housing status'.

To increase the richness of the interpretation of the results gained from the MCA, this work also drew on 22 interviews with representatives of LPHAs and other experts in the field that were conducted between 2020 and 2021.<sup>8</sup> This mixed-method approach allows for a more nuanced analysis of field positions and struggles within the field (strategies of capital accumulation and transformation). Furthermore, the identified field structure is also interpreted in light of emerging challenges of land scarcity that have led to new field dynamics and made the adaption of strategies necessary. The results reveal how the opposition between the housing market economy and social housing arrangements persistently structures the market. The next section highlights the main findings.

# 5 The Field of Social Housing Construction in Vienna

A field perspective helps discern market configurations by exploring underlying power relations and competing logics in social housing construction in Vienna. The geometric method of MCA allows for displaying data in spatial terms and illustrates the field of social housing construction as a two-dimensional space. More precisely, the field consists of two spaces, the space of companies and the space of properties. The latter displays the complexity of social relations by representing the relevant attributes (capital forms). Within this field, the location of variables and the location of cases show the relative capital structure and respective field positions that ultimately correspond to market strategies of LPHAs. The results show the distribution of relevant resources and hence the structure of the market, while the interpretation of field positions reveals competing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The total list of GBV-members in Vienna is accessible online, see https://www.gbv.at/gemeinnuetzige-bauwirtschaft/Mitglieder\_des\_Verbands/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The interviews took place online and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes each. The interviews were transcribed and content analysis applied. In order to keep respondents' identities and corporate affiliations anonymous, we had to refrain from giving details on characteristics of the interviewees.

strategies of capital accumulation in social housing construction.

Accordingly, in the following, the article first elaborates how dominant capital forms structure the field of social housing construction, and subsequently identifies separate field positions and related strategies of capital accumulation.

### 5.1 Dominant Capital Forms in the Field of Social Housing Construction

The distribution of properties (modalities of variables) that have a high explanatory power on the first two dimensions indicates the dominant capital forms and shows how they structure the field (see *Figure 2*). The first dimension accounts for 63.2% of total variance,

whereas the second dimension explains 18.9%. The field is, therefore, predominantly structured along axis 1, while axis 2 depicts additional variations. As modalities of variables that represent the extremes (very low or very high capital) are located on the first dimension (horizontal axis), this axis represents the volume of capital. The second dimension is constructed by modalities that reflect the relative distribution of different forms of capital, as variables representing high social and symbolic capital (collaborations, control: NO) are located on the top, while those representing economic capital are located at the bottom. This axis can thus be interpreted as representing the structure of capital.

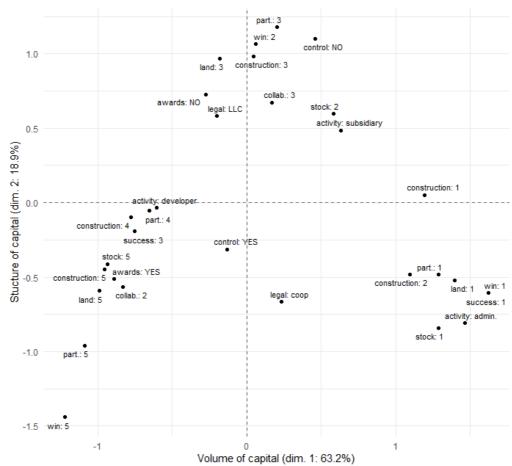


Figure 2: Attributes structuring the field of social housing construction

In more detail, the horizontal axis puts large LPHAs in opposition to smaller companies. On the right, various attributes, such as low construction activity, a small housing stock, and limited undeveloped property, indicate small economic size. At the same time, attributes like low participation and a low success rate in DCs, as well as limited new construction reflect not only a low volume of economic, but also of cultural capital. Contrary to those companies deprived of almost all forms of capital, companies on the left are characterized by having a large housing stock, owning vast amounts of undeveloped land, being very active in new construction as well as in DCs, and having received awards for their constructions. LPHAs located on the left side of the field retain all forms of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

The horizontal axis, thus, reflects the overall volume of capital. It is apparent that different forms of capital follow a similar pattern. Variables displaying economic size, such as housing stock or undeveloped land, are structured in the same way as variables expressing relevant knowhow for housing construction, such as new construction or participation in DCs. This is also expressed in the significant modalities of the 'activity' variable: The right side is occupied by administrators, who mainly manage their existing housing stock, while active developers are situated on the left side. A lack of economic capital is associated with a lack in cultural and symbolic capital, and vice versa.

The second dimension (vertical axis) shows two structuring aspects of the field. On the one hand, this dimension separates middle-sized companies on the upper end from both small and large ones at the lower end.9 On the other hand, differences in the relative distribution of capital become obvious. While indicators of economic capital (housing stock, undeveloped land) and cultural capital (DC participation, success rate, new construction) reflect the middle position of the overall capital volume, indicators of social capital (collaboration in DC, corporate networks/subsidiary) show a distinction between a small relative share (lower end) and a higher relative share (upper end). The high relative share of social capital either is the result of being part of a corporate network or subsidiary of another LPHA, or achieved by a high collaboration rate in DCs. The vertical axis, thus, reflects the relative share of capital and distinguishes positions according to capital structure: Independent companies, either large or small (bottom), are on the opposite of companies that are part of corporate networks or are effectively subsidiaries of other LPHAS (top). This is also expressed by the variable of legal status: The upper end is occupied by dependent limited liability companies, while cooperatives are situated at the lower end. The legal status thus reflects underlying differences in the capital configuration.

### 5.2 Field Positions and Capital Configurations of LPHAs

Moving from the space of properties to the space of individual LPHAs, different field positions can be identified. The relation between the positions – proximity or distance – constitutes the field of social housing construction. More specifically, one can distinguish four field positions (*Figure 3*).

On the bottom right of the graph lie the 'custodians,' who are deprived of almost all forms of capital, which confines their activities to predominantly managing their existing stock. On the opposite side, there are the incumbents of the field. In the bottom left corner, a group of companies clearly stand out from the others. Their dominant positions stem not only from economic capital, but more importantly from extensive amounts of cultural capital relevant in DCs ('innovators').10 At the top of the graph rest the LPHAs, with a mediumsized capital stock dominated by social capital ('collaborators'). The collaborators and the companies located between the collaborators and the innovators can be considered 'challengers,' as they compete with the 'innovators' for access to land mainly via DCs. Interestingly, LPHAs, who would be considered market leaders in the economic sense are also located in this intermediate position. The specific setup of the MCA applied in this study, which acknowledges all relevant capital forms within the field, puts those companies who predominantly rely on extensive economic capital ('enduring big') in proximity to the medium-sized challengers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The shape of the point cloud of the MCA is close to what is known in the literature as the 'arch effect' (or Guttman effect). The literature is somewhat divided over whether this effect is problematic in interpreting results or not. Especially in ecology studies, it is argued that the second axis is a mathematical artefact because variables have a linear relationship. Hjellbrekke argues that, for the social sciences, although it might not be the 'most interesting'

case, this result is still a substantial insight. However, he recommends focusing on the 'global plane, and not the individual axes' when interpreting results (Hjellbrekke 2019, p. 96).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Although innovation does not only grow out of participating in DCs, the term seems suitable for this group since being successful in DCs requires constant innovation regarding architecture, housing techniques, environmental issues, and social aspects.

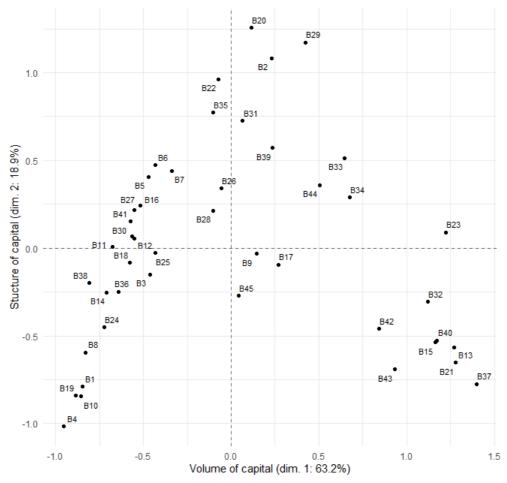


Figure 3: The field of social housing construction in Vienna

The overall low volume of capital distinguishes the 'custodians' from both big and middle-sized companies. All of them are organized as cooperatives, with three of them founded during the 1920s and five during the 1950s. Companies in this group show the lowest level of housing stock (between 73 and 1,583 dwellings), which is also reflected in low turnover rates. With an annual turnover between 874,000 and 10,145,000 USD, custodians are located in the bottom quartile of the sample. Moreover, this group has no land reserves, apart from B15 with land reserves worth 1 M EUR (which overall is still the third lowest value in the sample). Custodians are not only small in economic terms but also in organizational size. Only three of the custodians have administrative staff (between two and seven employees). The remaining five only employ maintenance workers or have no employees at all. In these cases, administration is either done on a voluntary basis or outsourced to other LPHAs. Although some LPHAs in this group have participated in DCs (between three and six times), often as smaller partner of larger companies, none of them have been successful. LPHAs in this group show very little to no construction activity. Those active have completed projects with 12 to 31 dwellings between 2016 and 2019.

The incumbents of the social housing market in Vienna are situated opposite of the custodians. These LPHAs are located at the far left of the graph, as the horizontal axis indicates the overall capital stock. The field is dominated by the 'innovators.' Interestingly, the innovators are also predominantly organized as cooperatives, with only one being a limited liability company. Except for one company that dates back to the early 20th century, the LPHAs in this group were founded between 1949 and 1953. They are not the biggest LPHAs in the field when it comes to turnover (annual turnover between 45 and 65M USD; for two of them, approximately 200M USD) or existing housing stock (between 7,000 and 16,000 dwellings). Their extensive amount of cultural and symbolic capital when it comes to DCs as well as their sufficient supply with economic capital sets the 'innovators' apart from others. Although their success rates are comparable to those of many 'challengers' (between 25 and 55 percent), they exceed all others when it comes to participating in DCs. With 27 to 54 submissions per company between 2005 and 2019, one third of all submissions originate from this group (200 out of 606). Their frequent submissions also translate into a high share of wins: 40 percent of the victories between 2005 and 2019 can be attributed to this group. On the one hand, their sufficient equipment with economic capital enables the high number of costly submissions. On the other hand, they have obtained extensive knowledge of formal and informal requirements during the tender, which makes them so successful. Moreover, they have also attracted much of the field's symbolic capital as all of them received honors for their projects (40 % of all awards received went to this group). Those 'innovators' can be considered incumbents in the artistic and technical aspects of housing construction as they own skills and expertise linked to the particular format of DCs.

The third field position is located at the top and characterized by a middle volume of economic and cultural capital and a high relative share of social capital. All LPHAs in this group are either subsidiaries of incumbents, joint ventures between incumbents, or part of a corporate network. This position is associated with a small-to-medium housing stock (between 2,000 and 10,000 dwellings), moderate housing construction performance (between approx. 50 and 200 over the last three years), and a medium amount of undeveloped land. Regarding cultural capital, there is reasonable involvement in DCs, however their participation rates (below 10 submissions per LPHA) are lower than those of the 'enduring big' and only slightly above the 'custodians.' They have poor success rates, except for one LPHA, which operates with an innovator as their parent company. A substantial part of this cluster belongs to one single corporate network, with the parent company being positioned closer to the incumbents in the field. The companies in this network have no employees - except for some blue-collar workers - but have constructed 100 to 230 units and have moderate participation in DCs, indicating that economic and cultural capital is pooled within the network while LPHAs remain formally independent.

Heterogeneous LPHAs are found between the innovators and collaborators, based on their descriptive characteristics. On the one hand, there are the 'enduring big,' large venerable enterprises who predominantly rely on economic capital in the form of owned properties and land reserves. They are amongst the top 10 in the sample when it comes to turnover (between 100 and 200M USD), undeveloped land reserves, housing stock (between 13,000 and 28,000 dwellings) and total assets

(between 800 million and one billion EUR). Moreover, they show high levels of construction activity. In this economic regard, they are better positioned than most of the 'innovators.' On the contrary, they hardly participate in DCs, participating an average of 10 times between 2005 and 2019, which means they have only accumulated a limited amount of cultural capital relevant to DCs. Whereas some have managed to achieve decent success rates with around four wins, others have only won once. If the importance of DC and related capital forms were neglected, these LPHAs would most certainly be dominating the field. Their idiosyncratic position in the analysis results from the fact that, in addition to the economic market logic, an artistic logic also characterizes the field of social housing construction, which is strengthened via DCs. Despite their high volume of (economic) capital, their relative lack of cultural capital brings them closer to middle-sized companies in the field, who draw on cultural capital to make up for a lack in economic capital and predominantly rely on DCs to catch up to the top of the field.

### 5.3 Capital Accumulation Strategies in Times of Land Scarcity

This section explores how field positions structure LPHA strategies for capital accumulation with regard to gaining access to land and funding in order to continue building activity. As outlined above, there are two sources: the private land market and city-owned land. Regarding the latter, LPHAs have to win the competitive tenure procedure of the DC. Regarding the former, rising prices on the private market for building plots pose a problem because making use of public subsidies for construction limits the eligible costs for purchasing land. As current market prices are way beyond this limit, acquisition of suitable land for subsidized social housing has become impossible, as all interviewees agree, 'to get a plot of land on the free market at the moment, to build purely subsidized, is virtually impossible in Vienna' (B10). In a similar vein, one interviewee explains, 'currently we cannot buy a single property in Vienna, which is dedicated at conditions suitable for housing subsidies. Those properties do not exist' (B8). Another interviewee highlights, 'land prices are now so high that we can no longer really create non-profit housing, i.e. affordable housing in the sense of the term' (B3). Depending on the overall position in the field and the respective capital configuration, LPHAs have different options and strategies to secure further capital accumulation in times of increasing competition and scarcity of land.

The 'custodians' are predominantly oriented towards administering their existing housing stock. Their overall lack in both economic and cultural capital poses obstacles for gaining access to building plots for new construction both in the market and via DCs. This is also reflected by hardly any construction activity. Not surprisingly, current market prices most affect those LPHAs with the least amount of financial resources and no existing land reserves. Additionally, their deprivation of capital in various forms also poses obstacles for acquiring land via DC. The prerequisites for participating in a tender are rather high, as interviews show. First, overall costs for the preparation of the submission amount up to 80,000 EUR, which are a considerable financial burden and make these tenders a high-risk investment that many of the custodians are not willing or able to take. Secondly, the lack of cultural capital in the form of employees poses a problem, as successfully managing a submission requires intensive work and demands procedural knowhow. It is exactly this kind of practical mastery that is key for success, as different respondents stress. 'Things. Like what you actually have to write in the submission or what exactly is required and what quality standard is expected' (B1). 'There are no formal entry barriers, but the procedure got so complicated, that you will not be able to win your first time. That's for sure' (B5). 'It is so complicated that it has become almost insider knowledge how to fill in the forms, how to do calculations, [...], someone doing this for the first time will despair' (B8). Thirdly, DCs predominantly consist of large development projects, which excludes smaller companies that can only handle smaller projects, both during construction and afterwards in building maintenance and administration. These obstacles discourage custodians from participating in a DC, which further reduces their chances of success because they cannot build up the necessary cultural capital. These exclusionary mechanisms of DCs imply that none of the custodians were successful so far. Some custodians address these difficulties in the construction of new dwellings by constructing housing projects without public funding on a very small scale from time to time. 'I have now bought a plot of land, we are still negotiating, because there are objections from the neighbors, and I want to build twenty-seven [privately financed] flats there, with that, I would fulfill my building obligation' (B13). Others use social capital to become partners of larger LPHAs or apply for

a temporary exemption from the obligation to build<sup>11</sup>, though this limits their capital accumulation.

The main strategy for 'innovators' to get access to land is via DCs. Although their land reserves are comparable to the 'enduring big,' they seem to be unable to capitalize on them, which makes winning in a DC vital for maintaining their construction activity. As one respondent emphasizes, 'we have in the balance sheet, it is not a secret, around forty or fifty million that are stashed away somewhere as land, but that is actually agricultural land', which is why, '90 percent we live on DCs' (B10). 'Innovators' have managed to accumulate relevant cultural capital over the past several years, which makes them successful competitors in DCs. This includes formal and informal knowledge regarding the tender procedure and formalities (formal cultural capital), being able to compile a successful team of architects, technicians, sociologists etc. (social capital), and new ideas and concepts that stand out from the others (innovative cultural capital). Their lead position is also symbolically acknowledged, as they regularly receive awards by the City of Vienna. Since the prize is a fixed position in one DC, they can transform symbolic capital into economic capital. Hence, 'innovators' managed to capitalize on the introduction of a new distributive mechanism by the municipality, which allows them to transform cultural, social, and symbolic capital into economic capital. This enables some companies to even improve their overall field position: 'Until the 90s, the company was actually a relatively small, "dozy" company, and the then managing director started to participate in developer competitions [...] And through the developer competitions we expanded fast. We roughly doubled in size during this phase not solely because of the competitions, but to a very large extent. And we went from being a sleepy, insignificant company to one of the most innovative in Vienna' (B1). However, whereas in the early days competition was limited because only a few LPHAs participated in the tenders, today 'competition has become fierce' (B8). This development puts 'innovators' in direct competition with medium-sized LPHAs (challengers), and increasingly also the 'enduring big,' for access to building plots. Challengers also have accumulated a reasonable amount of cultural capital, which makes them fairly successful in DCs. With more LPHAs driven to entering the competitive arena because of high land prices on the private market, the overall pressure in the field increases as both innovators

 $<sup>^{11}</sup>$  §7 Abs 5 WGG: so-called 'construction breaks' can be granted for a maximum amount of six years (re-application after first 3 years).

and challengers are highly dependent on winning in DCs.

On the contrary, the 'enduring big' can rely on the economic capital that they accumulated over decades of building activity. Their large land reserves make them less affected by current market prices and therefore less dependent on land redistribution by the city. However, the 'enduring big' use DCs as a way to fast-track the reclassification of greenfields into building plots. In that case, LPHAs own land themselves and only submit to DCs in qualitative terms. The developer has a 'fixed spot' (Fixstarter), and is part of the procedure but does not face the risk of losing the competition. 'But these developers, who were involved in the acquisition, bring their plots into the competition process. It is quite clear from the beginning how many flat and how many square meters of usable living space they will get out of the zoning and competition procedure' (B5). Furthermore, participating in DCs is seen as more important for adding to the companies' symbolic capital rather than gaining access to land, as the next quote shows: 'Thankfully, in sum we are in a position, where this |DC| is not quite so important for us, because we have the opportunity to participate in some development areas in the city, where we foreseeably will generate enough sales. But, I guess, for sure it is also part of the reputation of a developer in Vienna to be visible in the DC.' (B5).

The 'collaborators' have a different approach to accumulating capital than both the smaller and the larger LPHAs. They follow a strategy of transforming social capital into cultural capital, which is necessary for economic capital accumulation. This is done in two distinct ways: First, companies can become the subsidiary of one of the larger LPHAs and therefore be part of a larger corporate network. By joining larger companies or by joining forces with other medium-sized companies, existing LPHAs are able to continue their activity. This allows them to combine the management of their housing stock and jointly develop new construction projects. One respondent describes this constellation as a 'management association,' which is run separately from the company's asset holders. The former 'runs the management for them' and allows them 'relatively high efficiency in that area' as they 'don't have to gather the experience of each company ourselves, but we can gather it from project to project and then use it everywhere' (W2). By building on the existing economic and cultural capital of their parent company, companies that are in effect only managers of existing housing stock get a share of new constructions and can increase their economic capital in accordance with

overall market developments. In turn, the parent company can enter competitions more often through these subsidiaries and achieve economies of scale by managing a larger housing stock. 'So, we jointly agree which company or which cooperative is to be served with a competition, so to speak. And often it is the case that multiple participations are possible' (B7). The second strategy does not build on corporate linkages but on collaborations in DCs. Social capital in the form of informal contacts is used to gain access to the cultural and economic capital of bigger and more experienced companies. 'So these constellations are of course not among strangers. There are people I have known for many years, then we say, well, let's do something together again. [...] I can contribute a lot when it comes to the development and organization of a project, while the partner has a very efficient construction department' (B2).

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper gives a detailed account of the relations between LPHAs as the most important providers of new social housing today and shows how their field positions structure their possibilities in getting access to land. Two developments bear challenges for LPHAs in this regard. Rising prices for building plots on the private market and increasing competition with private developers pose obstacles for acquiring land that meets the limits of eligible purchase costs for subsidized social housing construction. This drives more and more LPHAs to enter competitive tenders from the city to gain access to land via DCs. So, while the dependency on this format increases for many, the chances of winning decrease as competition has risen significantly.

Depending on their position within the field, LPHAs can make use of different strategies in getting access to land. By analyzing field positions and respective strategies, we can understand how challenges translate into problems for some actors, while others can strengthen their position. Larger companies with extensive amounts of economic capital draw on their land reserves and are less affected by either market prices or a decreasing probability of success in DCs. However, their lack of experience and hence success in DCs could make these companies more vulnerable in the future if the situation for the private market does not improve. The innovators benefit from the extensive amount of cultural capital they have accumulated over the years, which still puts them in a comfortable position, yet, the growing pressure means that they also have to continuously raise their stakes. Especially middle-sized companies are highly dependent on transforming cultural and or social capital into access to land. The smaller cooporatives are increasingly excluded as they are deprived of all forms of capital currently necessary to successfully compete for building plots.

With DCs, Vienna has created an instrument that clearly influences market principles and market configurations. Although economic capital remains the pivotal currency, the instrument strengthened capital linked to technological and social innovation as well as social networks in the competition for land and funding. This invigorates the artistic aspect of housing construction against purely economic principles, and thereby enhances the market position of the companies that managed to accumulate sufficient cultural capital. The incumbents in the field of social housing construction are not necessarily the economically big companies, but the companies that innovate social housing more broadly. The findings reveal how the opposition between economic aspects of housing development and artistic aspects of social housing persistently structure the market.

These developments in the production of social housing in Vienna also have far-reaching implications for the future supply of social housing and therefore for tenants. Because of the scarcity of land, which proved to be scarcity of appropriate land for social housing construction, and increasing competition over land distribution from the city government, non-publicly subsidized dwellings have gained importance in the past decade. Their share on completed dwelling from LPHAs in Vienna increased from 7 (2012) to 37 percent (2019) (GBV). Although the cost-coverage principle applies in both cases, rents will be higher in privately financed dwellings as higher land prices flow into rents.

The results highlight that it is not a question of state or market, rather the (local) state creates the framework conditions and always shapes the functioning of markets. A field perspective gives a nuanced picture of how this is done, by highlighting relevant forms of capital, capital configurations, and objective relations between market actors. This approach helps to understand that markets have histories, dominant actors, dominant principles, and specific trajectories (Fligstein, 2018, p. 240). This study makes a valuable contribution to the empirical application of this concept and offers important insights into how the functioning of markets can be studied. Overall, this detailed analysis highlights the importance of understanding markets as fields, if we want to grasp how economic activity is embedded in social relations. Therefore, these findings can help adapt regulations and strengthen the city's steering capacity to secure the continuation of effective social housing provision by taking into account prevailing power relations.

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