

Sufficiency in Housing: Exploring sustainability-oriented living arrangements

Progress report 1 – The role of infrastructural organizations

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Overview

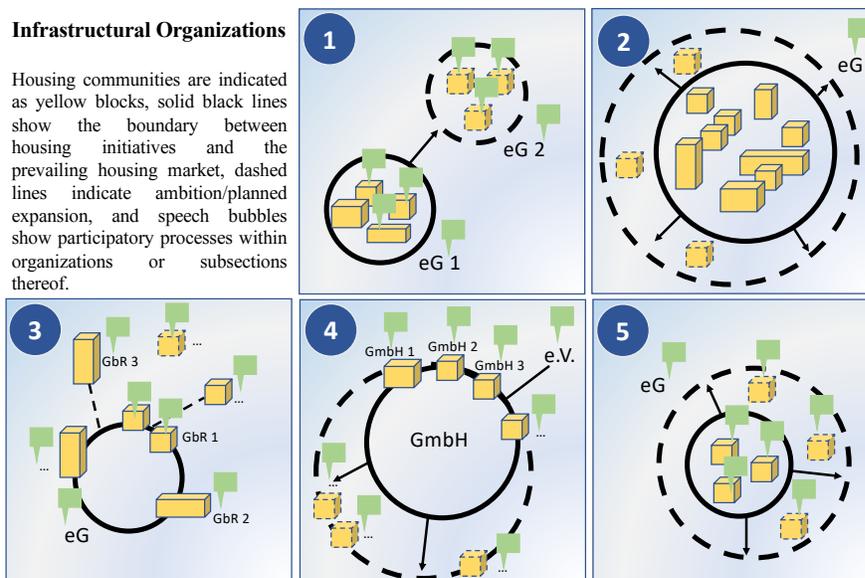
This report summarizes progress made on the ‘Sufficiency in Housing’ project during fieldwork which took place in June 2022 in Freiburg and Heidelberg (DE). Sufficiency is a process of questioning what is actually needed and desired, making ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ subject to negotiation and debate and ultimately leading to collectively decided limitation (Heikkurinen et al, 2019) as well as reorientation beyond materialist notions of prosperity. The project’s overarching question is: *How does sufficiency manifest in sustainable housing communities?* We visited four community-led housing initiatives and interviewed six people, including both residents of these communities and individuals working for organizations aimed at supporting these projects from conception and design to construction and continuation.

Key Findings

Housing in Freiburg and Heidelberg, as well as Germany as a whole, is becoming increasingly expensive, developer-driven, and based on a model of individualist consumerism. In contrast, our research on community-led housing initiatives found diverse activities that deliver sufficiency-oriented outcomes (1). An important mechanism for coordinating and sustaining these activities involves what we call ‘infrastructural organizations,’ (IO) which support the development and maintenance of community-led housing (2). Amongst others, this includes financial support, legal advice, provision of legal form, process-oriented guidance, and network building. The IO’s themselves make use of diverse legal forms which are characterized by distinct aims and practices.

(1) Sufficiency-oriented practices – Multiple sufficiency practices are involved in community-led housing, including: substantial communal spaces for communal and convivial living; use of ecological building materials and integration of renewable energy; sharing practices and agreed limitations to building design and use; and collective decision-making. Together, these reinforce that socially and ecologically beneficial outcomes can occur in housing communities.

(2) Legal forms of infrastructural organizations (IOs) – We uncovered different legal forms for IOs, which we visualize below.



Practices of enabling community-led housing – Each IO has a distinct way of supporting and/or catalyzing further community-led housing initiatives:

- 1 – *Hesitant-effective replication*: IO embedded within community itself, choice to remain separate from other groups, support contingent on the initiative of individuals and not inscribed into purposes of organization (Genova).
- 2 – *Monolithic expansion*: IO aims to widen scope of activities by incorporating more distinct and unconnected groups (Bauverein Breisgau eG and ‘typical’ co-operatives).
- 3 – *Building constellations*: IO contributes to the development of a network of relatively autonomous groups, although these all share some connection to IO (pro...).
- 4 – *Interwoven resistance*: IO builds solidarity-based linkages across groups and implements measures to prevent re-marketization (Mietshäuser Syndikat).
- 5 – *Joint experimentation*: IO is learning and trying new combinations to accelerate groups’ formation and success (Dachgenossenschaft).

Diverse rationalities and logics: The IOs exhibit diverse orientations, concerns, and narratives. We analyzed the practices of each IO in terms of several dimensions of the housing projects they support, expanding our understanding the diversity of housing initiatives.

	Legal form(s)	Economy	Community/identity/central myth	Organizing & communal spaces	Ecological concern
Genova <i>Hesitant replication</i>	eG	Affordable for all, non-market	Solidarity and affordability	Communal living, shared areas instead of private spaces	Medium-high
Bauverein Breisgau eG <i>Expansive ambition</i>	eG	More affordable, non-market	Affordability and security	Generally no shared spaces	Low
pro... <i>Building constellations</i>	mixed	Pooled resources, hybrid non/market	Communal living	Co-housing, shared areas in houses	Medium
Mietshäuser Syndikat <i>Interwoven resistance</i>	mixed (GmbH, eV)	Permanent removal from housing market	Resistance and solidarity to create affordable housing	Communal living, shared areas in some houses	Medium
Dachgenossenschaft <i>Experimentation</i>	eG	Pooled resources, non-market	Working to build community ties	tbd?	Medium-high

(green = primary data from scoping study; yellow = secondary data only)

Implications – Our project highlights how the practices of IOs can be ‘translated up’ to other communities and policymakers, as well as the barriers to wider implementation.

- IOs pay attention to a range of concerns, using different legal forms to rethink communities’ relationship to the for-profit housing market, to organize for solidarity and communality, and to integrate ecological concerns into housing.
- There are tensions between interaction with the profit-oriented (i.e. rentier, developer) housing market versus removal from this market. Legal form can be manipulated to retain a separation from markets.
- While legal forms are a key way for mediating relationship-to-profit of (post-)growth organizations (Hinton, 2020), the same legal form is used *differently* in the IOs studied.
- Organizations construct their relationship to profit, showing how housing markets are *multiple* and *performed* according to different values (Lloveras et al, 2020).
 - Profit-oriented vs. affordability-oriented vs. sufficiency-oriented.

Next steps – There is more to uncover through this research. We plan to conduct further fieldwork and interviews to capture the range of IOs in Freiburg and Heidelberg. We also are exploring funding opportunities to study sufficiency in everyday life in community-led housing.

Getting in touch – If you would like to discuss this project further, the authors can be reached at: j.s.vandeventer@hud.ac.uk and benedikt.schmid@geographie.uni-freiburg.de.