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Housing First Vienna, Case Study No. 5

Paper

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## Housing First Vienna

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Case Study N°5  
June 2015

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# 1 The initiative and its organizers

This case study is about *Housing First* in Vienna. Its focus is the pilot project which was established in a close cooperation between *neunerhaus*, one of the smaller service providers of assistance to homeless people, and *Fonds Soziales Wien (FSW)*, an outsourced organization of the city that provides facilities and funding for care for elderly, giving shelter to homeless people and refugees, and support for people with disabilities. *FSW* is also responsible for strategy development in their fields of activity. The pilot project is taking place in a context of policy reorientation in the field of homelessness (see Riesenfelder et al. 2012), with other key service providers for homeless people in Vienna implementing diverse experimentations on different forms of *Housing First*.

*Neunerhaus* was created at the turn of the century by a civic movement of volunteers that tried to find innovative solutions for homeless people living next to a railway station in a central district of Vienna. Out of this small initiative, *neunerhaus* grew into a professional organization that not only runs several emergency accommodations and houses for temporary living in Vienna, but also provides social work and medical services for homeless people and their pets. According to key actors of *neunerhaus*, the organization's work has always been based on the principle of emancipation, understood as supporting individual autonomy. They therefore had a strong interest in finding more individualized and better fitting approaches to solving the problems of homeless people. The aim was thus to replace the established model of homeless charity with a three pillar model: the former consisted of consecutive stages of emergency accommodations, temporary housing and, eventually, own apartments. The latter is based on three parallel possibilities, namely living on the street with ambulant assistance and emergency accommodation, living in institutions, i.e. houses for people with special needs, and living in own apartments. This last option should be the general standard (*Housing First* and mobile assistance) (Halbartschlager et al. 2012, 4, Hammer et al. 2013, 4). Permanent accommodation should thus become available without having to pass all the previous stages first. A reference for the ideas on the reconceptualization of assistance for the homeless was found in the US approach to *Housing First* for people with psychiatric diagnoses and problems with drug abuse (see Tsemberis/ Asmussen 1999).

The discourse on *Housing First* has been reflected in the 'Evaluation of the Viennese Assistance Programme for the Homeless' (Riesenfelder et al. 2012) in which the experimentation with pilot projects was recommended. In the meantime, *Housing First* has thus generated related projects by other service providers (see below) and governance forms. The *FSW* and several service providers have established working groups to discuss future principles and standards of homeless charity in Vienna and also perspectives for promoting affordable housing. Additionally, conferences with a nation-wide outreach were organized. Politics, however, is still to follow. Although *The Greens*, the junior partner in the governing coalition, seem to have agreed on a definitive position in favor of *Housing First*, the social-democratic party – the well-established senior partner – has decided to wait for further evaluations of the experimental implementations of *Housing First* before reaching a final position. A definite decision on how to proceed will thus only be taken in 2015 when the publicly funded pilot project of *neunerhaus* will be finished and results of evaluations available. In the meantime, the strongly coordinated process under the leadership of *FSW* guarantees that all actors are adequately informed about changes that are being effectuated and that they are in a position to get involved. Furthermore, the allocation of clients to the projects of service providers is organized by the city's office for the consultation of homeless people, to make sure that access criteria for individual projects remain transparent and thus, that all projects stay equally accessible for all relevant target groups.

## 2 Basic information on the local context and the emerging problems

The pressure to find innovative housing solutions for people in need stems from two different but intertwined problem areas. On the one hand, despite the high standard of services for the homeless there is the desire to find better fitting solutions for people who have become homeless and require appropriate accommodation to find stability in their lives (see Riesenfelder et al. 2012). On the other hand, *Housing First* also reacts to the increasing pressure tenants confront on the Viennese housing market.

Concerning the first issue, the restructuring of social work approaches should not only improve the quality of counseling but also reduce the complexity of service provision. *“In Vienna a variety of offers exists in the field of aid for homeless people, which looks back on a longstanding tradition. The Vienna Social Fund (FSW), in close networking with various collaborating organisations, provides funding for this variety of offers. The number of collaboration partners has grown to comprise 21 organisations at present. As renowned partners of the FSW, they are significantly involved in the provision of a wide spectrum of services, with the result that, with more than 4,500 night shelters and housing places and a number of outpatient services, more than 85 different offers are currently providing assistance for homeless people.”* (Riesenfelder et al. 2012, 9). Numbers of clients have been steadily increasing together with service offers in the last couple of years (see Table 1).

**Table 2: Number of places in different service offers for homeless people in Vienna**

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Night shelters	270	290	454	412
Transitional accommodation	1202	1246	1234	1225
Accommodation for specific target groups <sup>321</sup>	321	323	322	379
Mother and child/ family facilities	236	267	267	297
Supervised housing in apartments	713	774	898	1098
Permanent housing/ socially supported housing	751	776	773	1076
Night shelters	-12.9%	7.4%	56.6%	-9.3%
Transitional accommodation	20.7%	3.7%	-1.0%	-0.7%
Accommodation for specific target groups	-3.6%	0.6%	-0.3%	17.7%
Mother and child/ family facilities		13.1%	0.0%	11.2%
Supervised housing in apartments	0.0%	8.6%	16.0%	22.3%
Permanent housing/ socially supported housing	43.0%	3.3%	-0.4%	39.2%

Source: Riesenfelder et al. 2012, 18

For many years, different service providers have experienced and expressed the need to change the system for various reasons and different social groups. This way, housing charity followed discussions that were also led in the context of social work approaches for mentally disabled persons, which had the consequence that most major institutional forms of accommodation were closed in Vienna<sup>1</sup>. The discourse on changing the system has started before the *neunerhaus* pilot project begun and was not restricted to the

<sup>1</sup> This was also the aim in the project *wohnbasis* by *wieder wohnen*, starting in 2005. With this project, the city attempted to replace institutional forms of accommodation for families by the provision of private apartments.

city administration and the actors of *neunerhaus*, but was discussed in the teams of other organizations too. As was argued in the focus group, established methods had to be questioned as people with multiple problems often not only lacked the competences to live in institutional accommodations but at the same were not prepared for living on their own during the first two phases. As clients were expected to acquire competences such as living in a community and sharing facilities, which they most likely would not need once they moved into their own apartment, they would hardly acquire competences that were relevant for living by oneself. *Housing First* therefore aims at avoiding the first two intermediate stages by giving clients access to permanent own apartments right from the start. Besides, services also had to be modified because of lacking skills of social workers (e.g. regarding language competences to serve groups of migrants who require assistance by the system of homeless charity).

Concerning the second issue, the increasing pressures of the Viennese housing market<sup>2</sup>, official data show that the income of households that apply for public assistance to fight evictions has been steadily increasing in the period 2005-2011 (see Table 2). This indicates that it is getting difficult even for the medium income strata to pay the rent (80 per cent of the clients are in danger of being evicted due to accumulated rent debts). Therefore, the risks of becoming homeless have increasingly become an issue for parts of the working population that have problems with budget management, even more so when they are entering a crisis in their personal lives (e.g. divorce etc.). Nonetheless, due to legal reforms in the system of eviction prevention (see below), evictions, as well as claimed ones, have both decreased over the last decade (claimed evictions decreased from 26.322 in 2002 to 22.294 in 2011, evictions from 6.821 in 2004 to 2.789 in 2011). In 2011, 4.666 apartments could be preserved due to successful mediation and consulting by eviction prevention services (MA 24 2012, 180-181).

**Table 2: Household incomes of clients of *Wiener Wohnungssicherung* 2005-2011 (share of total clients)**

<i>in Euro</i>	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
> 2000	9,7%	11,7%	12,9%	13,8%	14,7%	16,4%	16,6%
1500-1999	15,4%	15,8%	14,5%	15,8%	17,0%	20,4%	18,7%
1000-1499	26,1%	27,7%	33,0%	28,1%	28,3%	30,6%	31,3%
500-999	39,0%	40,2%	36,0%	37,6%	37,5%	29,2%	29,4%
< 499	9,9%	4,5%	3,5%	4,7%	2,5%	3,4%	3,9%

Source: MA 24 2012, 184

With regard to the pressure stemming from the housing market, one has to understand the rather complicated institutional framework of rent setting mechanisms in Austria and Vienna. The rent market consists of four different sectors: (1) The municipal housing sector, containing objects that are still owned and managed by the city itself; (2) the limited-profit sector that is strongly regulated by a federal law (*Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitgesetz*) and often organized in the form of co-operatives and (3) private buildings that have been constructed before the second world war, which are still strongly regulated and thus comparatively cheap and (4) private buildings which have been constructed without public subsidies after the second world war and underlie almost no rent restrictions. Against a background of constant population

<sup>2</sup> An in-depth description of the Austrian housing system is provided in D11.2 on welfare systems in case study countries.

growth and insufficient new construction in the last years, rents have been rising significantly in Vienna since 2008 – especially in the unregulated private sector (see Kunnert/Baumgartner 2012, 82).

Although the municipal housing sector – with a share of approximately a quarter of the total number of apartments in Vienna – is still very large (Stadt Wien – Wiener Wohnen 2013, 13) and thus, would in principle be well prepared to house all vulnerable groups of the population, there are two limitations in meeting this demand. On the one hand, the city tries to promote a mix of social groups in all neighborhoods of the city as well as all sectors of the housing market including its own estates. It wants to avoid that public housing becomes social housing in the pejorative sense of “housing for the poor”. The City of Vienna is, thereby, opposing attempts of the European Commission to limit public housing to poor housing. For this reason, income limits for accommodation in the municipal sector are not very restrictive and many tenants decide to stay in subsidized apartments even if they could afford looking for accommodation in the private sector or even buy own property. Moreover, there are generous regulations enabling family members to enter into rent contracts of their relatives. A consequence of this policy is that every year, less than half of all apartments within the municipal housing stock become available for persons on the relevant waiting list (about eight to ten thousand of a total of more than 200.000). This is clearly not sufficient, especially as apartments are not given to the most vulnerable households only. On the other hand, there are groups of people living in Vienna who do not have access to the municipal housing stock, partly because they do not meet the criteria (e.g. insufficient years of residence in the city), and partly because they have been banned from access to the sector due to arrears of rent in the past.

### 3 Genesis of the initiative

The initiative of *neunerhaus* has different origins that have been mutually enforcing each other. Already in the mid-2000s the actors within *Fonds Soziales Wien (FSW)* realized that they would need a different form of services for vulnerable and in particular homeless families, as they were most dependent on stable environments and supportive neighborhood settings. Therefore, its service unit *wieder wohnen* developed the project *wohnbasis* for families in 2005, which has in the meantime been opened for the participation of other target groups. Besides the desire to stabilize the social environment for families, the more general idea arose, to overcome the destabilizing effects of constantly changing neighborhoods and deferred paths to independence. These aspects of the traditional approaches to assistance were in the center of the problem analysis by the actors of *neunerhaus*, but were obviously also problematized by other organizations working in the field. At the same time, the problems of the established model of homeless charity were also recognized in other provinces of Austria and discussions about the deinstitutionalization of services as well as concrete experiments were started in other parts of the country. Exchange on decentralized discussions was later also encouraged by a conference organized by *bawo – Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe*, the umbrella organization representing local organizations on the federal level. The US approach entered the European discussion several years ago and has been implemented in innovative projects in several European cities. Since then, European research projects and conferences have promoted exchange between European approaches.<sup>3</sup>

In 2010, the organization’s managing director was lobbying with the representatives of the Viennese *Greens*, when they entered negotiations to form a coalition government with the *Social-democrats* in the

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<sup>3</sup> There will be an in depth analysis on this issue at a later stage of ImPRovE.

city and federal state of Vienna. In the coalition agreement, the two parties committed themselves to the idea that *Housing First* should substitute existing services. Concrete ideas for implementation should be derived from the European pilot project *Housing First* in which Vienna participated (Halbartschlager et al. 2012, 3). Based on these considerations, the management of *neunerhaus* decided to fund a study on potentials of implementing *Housing First* in Vienna. This study laid the basis for a broader discussion process that started in 2011. In close cooperation with the city administration and under the leadership of *Fonds Soziales Wien (FSW)* all relevant actors in the field got involved. At that time, *FSW* could already draw on experiences made with its project *wohnbasis*. This project was also Vienna's contribution to a European research project on *Housing First* (see Busch-Geertsma 2013). In retrospect, when the more radical approach to *Housing First* suggested by *neunerhaus* was presented for the first time to the community of social service providers in the field, the responsible head of unit from *FSW* confronted quite some skepticism or even opposition to some aspects of the idea of basing homeless charity on maximum individual autonomy and responsibility. Especially organizations that based their practical approach on a strong link between housing provision and social work seemed skeptical, as they were afraid of losing discretionary power (such as having a key to clients' apartments), which they considered crucial for following their pedagogical concept.

In 2012 *neunerhaus* started a pilot project on *Housing First* for which special funding was made available by the city. It will receive public funding until 2015 to support academic reflection and evaluations. Soon after *neunerhaus*, also *Caritas* implemented its own approach to *Housing First*, although this implicates a less radical shift and is more limited in reach than the approach of *neunerhaus*. Moreover, some projects with a strong link to *Housing First* have been implemented: With its project *FLATworks*, *Volkshilfe* is mostly concerned with finding apartments for people entitled to asylum and immigrant families, who are homeless or in danger of losing their apartments. Their approach is also based on a combination of the provision of shelter and social work. Tenancy contracts should be taken over by clients at the end of counseling. To facilitate the implementation of *Housing First* in Vienna, supporting mobile social work offers have been established by other service providers such as *Heilsarmee*. Besides, other service providers have provided small apartments in their own buildings for some years (Kittel, 2014, 88).

Whatever the most adequate narrative of the genesis of socially innovative solutions is, from the perspective of the local branch of statehood, the development of *Housing First* in Vienna was clearly not a bottom-up process but bottom-linked in the sense that a social service provider defined a discourse and implemented innovative solutions in strong collaboration with the public administration. The implementation of the pilot project therefore relied on the interest of a public administration that had already significantly contributed service innovation itself. While the pilot project only required public funding, *FSW* reorganized the services for homeless families and participated in a European research project on *Housing First* even before. Thus, from a more general perspective, the case study would suggest that innovations in the Austrian welfare system are closely linked to welfare state institutions.

#### **4 The activities and organization of *Housing First***

*Neunerhaus* is taking care of homeless people and of people who are in danger of becoming homeless. Besides offering the standard services in the form of emergency accommodation, temporary accommodation and social counseling, *neunerhaus* also provides medical services for homeless persons and their

pets. The *Housing First* pilot project is organized as an own organizational unit besides two houses offering rooms for temporary accommodation, one house for assisted living and a unit for the provision of temporary accommodation in individual apartments (Hammer et al. 2013). The Housing First unit is concerned with networking for the provision of apartments and offering flexible and case-sensitive counseling. To facilitate the provision of affordable apartments, which is the key bottleneck considering the Viennese housing market, a special platform for the acquisition of apartments called *ERST WOHNEN* (the German translation of Housing First) was established in cooperation with selected companies in the field of housing and housing finance. The aim is to foster even more cooperation with private housing companies and housing associations. Against the backdrop of increasing housing costs and rents, the overall goal is to contribute to the promotion of affordable housing in general (Hammer et al. 2013, 5). Because of the central position of Housing First in the organization's strategy, the management of *neunerhaus* invests more than average resources and organizational capacity in the pilot project.

*Housing First* is based on five principles in Vienna (Halbartschlager et al. 2012, 5-6): (1) Direct access to permanent and safe accommodation, (2) separation between housing administration and personal assistance (i.e. apartments and social work should be provided by separate organizations), (3) promotion of social inclusion (support to build up social networks in the neighborhood, also by providing information on existing institutions), (4) autonomy and participation (clients define themselves how much assistance they need and what kind of apartment they are looking for), and (5) flexible assistance for individual needs (personal assistance should also be continued even if the apartment is lost, e.g. due to serious illness etc.). *Housing First* in the understanding of *neunerhaus* thus aims at realizing a way to a quick re-integration into a completely self-determined life by providing assistance while avoiding too much paternalism.

In contrast to the US approach to *Housing First* (see Tsemberis/ Asmussen 1999), all Viennese projects do not focus on persons with psychiatric diagnoses or problems of drug addiction, but are concerned with housing problems of a much broader group of people. In many cases, these persons have either lost their apartments because of personal hardship or due to an acquired inability to structure their personal finances. Therefore, apart from providing new apartments to their clients as quickly as possible, organizations that run *Housing First* projects also provide accompanying, individualized and more or less obligatory social pedagogic support. This is done in order to work on the underlying causes of homelessness and assist clients in finding a new structure in their daily lives in general, and in meeting their financial duties in particular. In the case of *Caritas*, for example, based on many years of experience in the field, the interviewed head of unit indicated that the insufficient ability to take care of one's own finances is the key problem of most of their clients. This is the reason why *Caritas* decided to let their clients enter the rent contract only after a trial period of two years.

*Neunerhaus* defined the following criteria for clients to qualify for the project (Hammer et al. 2012, 7): They need to be homeless or in acute danger of becoming homeless, require care or personal assistance, declare having an own apartment with an own lease contract a desired goal, and be of legal age and qualify for getting financial support. Exclusion criteria (ibid., 8) are to be dependent on stationary care, in acute danger of harming themselves or others, or to show a kind of behavior that could have serious adverse effects on their social environment. The latter might justify the accommodation in an institutional setting (although one should be aware that this behavior could also be caused by institutional settings). The professional standards developed on these considerations are focused on establishing permanent accommodation in order to support psychosocial stabilization and the promotion of autonomy and participation by

living in own, affordable apartments. Respect and support for autonomy and privacy are essential. Nonetheless, it still needs to be defined to what degree existing services can be replaced, based on the evaluations that are to come. The funding body at least aims at reducing the number of people in emergency accommodation (Halbartschlager et al. 2012, 3).

Not all service providers saw their perspective sufficiently taken into consideration in the professional standards that were developed for *neunerhaus*. Therefore, *Caritas*, one of the major players in the delivery of social services in Austria, started its own pilot project in November 2012, without receiving additional funding from *FSW*. While *wieder wohnen*, the service unit of *FSW*, and *Caritas* first enter the tenancy contract as organizations and establish a mandatory link between social work and the provision of accommodation, *neunerhaus* encourages clients to take responsibility for their tenancy agreement right from the start and only provides supporting counseling. *Caritas* and *FSW*'s project *wohnbasis* thus follow a two-stage approach: First the social organization enters into contract with the landlord while the client is obliged to follow guidance and instructions by a social worker. Only if they prove reliable in meeting negotiated obligations and especially payment targets within a certain timeframe, which is usually set at two years, are they entitled to enter the tenancy contract themselves.

A key priority of all Housing First projects apart from the city's own project (i.e. *wohnbasis* by *wieder wohnen* that provides only accommodation in the municipal housing sector) is to acquire apartments in the private and co-operative housing sectors. To this end, they all develop different strategies. *Caritas* has a certain stock of apartments at their disposal for which they have long-term head lease agreements. In addition, they negotiate with private landlords as well as housing associations and co-operatives to obtain further apartments for their portfolio. *Caritas* sees its role as a mediator between housing providers and clients. To guarantee stable relationships with housing providers, they try to stay independent of the possibility of a clients' weak payment morale for as long as possible. In contrast, *neunerhaus* takes the risk of losing apartments due to clients' inability to meet their financial obligations. Nonetheless, their approach is also based on the establishment of good relationships with housing providers. Access is facilitated by supporters of *neunerhaus* from the banking and housing sectors (see below) via the provision of networks and expertise on the system-logic of the housing sector. *Flatworks* by *Volkshilfe* is a special case as their target group is persons who confront difficulties in accessing the housing market due to migratory background. The project team therefore aims at improving the accessibility of the housing market in general for this group of people.

In the first round of project implementation, *neunerhaus* aims to house 50 people who require a certain degree of psycho-social care in the private and limited-profit housing sectors; meetings with social workers are thereby negotiated with clients who may also terminate this relationship if they feel that there is no requirement for it anymore. The primary goal is to empower clients to achieve autonomy in organizing their everyday lives. To this end, social workers also try to strengthen support networks of relevant institutions in the neighborhood (see Kittel, 2014, 80ff). *Caritas* tries to organize accommodation for 38 young persons (aged between 18 and 30) and parents with children. Despite organizational differences (see above), *Caritas*' targets are comparable to those of *neunerhaus*.

## 5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

As *Housing First* was initiated in cooperation between the local administration and social service providers it must be seen as a case of bottom-linked social innovation. Social innovation in our understanding is characterized by content and process dimensions as well as the empowerment of the target group of the innovation (see Oosterlynck et al. 2013). The content dimension is about meeting basic (social) needs, which in the case of *Housing First* does not only relate to the creation of security by providing permanent accommodation, but also to the support and coaching in structuring daily lives, finding adequate job opportunities, managing financial duties etc. What is more, a key concern of the *Housing First* approach is to stabilize clients by giving them the opportunity to stay in their new social environment permanently, and by assisting them in creating social networks and positive social bonds within their community or neighborhood respectively.

The process dimension is conceptualized as a change of social relations. This is fulfilled less by guaranteeing the direct participation of clients but rather by 'bottom-linked' co-operations between local administrations and civil society, comprising also social service providers. *Housing First* has already changed the governance system in the field, as service providers with innovative concepts (especially *neunerhaus*) established stronger links with the administration. In principle, this can be seen as proof of improved accessibility of the state but also as an outcome of changing policy networks due to a changing government coalition. That is to say, policy networks in Vienna should also have changed due to the *Greens'* participation in the municipal government, who insisted on having a clause on *Housing First* in the coalition agreement. Therefore the impetus for innovative solutions could be a consequence of the convincing argument *neunerhaus* developed in its study, of the effect of successful lobbying with the junior partner in the government and of the right problematization of necessary developments in the field at the right time that coincided with an already existing reorientation of strategies within the administration. As has been laid down above, not only *FSW* itself but also other service providers have been thinking for years about how to reorganize the service provision for homeless people in Vienna in order to improve the adequacy in meeting clients' needs. With this aim in mind, governance relations have therefore also changed as these actors were all involved in co-operative strategy development. Thereby, as was discussed in the focus group, *Housing First* might have initiated a process of stronger co-ordination and consolidation in the field.

Participation of clients, however, has mostly not been considered a core element of the individual approaches of *Housing First*. This has been legitimized with the difficulties of most clients to structure their individual life, which therefore need to be the first priority. They could only in a second step be involved in the program and strategy development. Nonetheless, especially on behalf of the public administration there are also voices regretting that participation was not more of a topic in the stage of strategy development. Most actors in the field agree, however, that due to the specific problem dimensions of clients, traditional forms of individual or collective participation cannot be the first solution. First, clients would have to be empowered for participation by affirmative social workers, who take their problems seriously and create an understanding for the value of voicing their own interests. Then forms of collective mobilization could become possible at least on a project basis. Still, this could be difficult to achieve as the homeless – especially when compared with other disadvantaged groups such as the blind or the deaf – lack a strong collective identity and are therefore hard to organize.

As assistance in creating social networks and positive social bonds within their community or neighborhood respectively is a key target of *Housing First*, empowerment may be regarded as core desideratum of

*Housing First* in Vienna. There is, however, a certain spectrum of the concrete interpretation of empowerment in the field, oscillating between more paternalistic and more individualistic understandings. While some actors regard an approach that includes a mandatory consultation of clients with social workers as paternalistic, the delegation of too much responsibility to the individual person is regarded an indicator for the neoliberalization of social work from other actors' points of view.

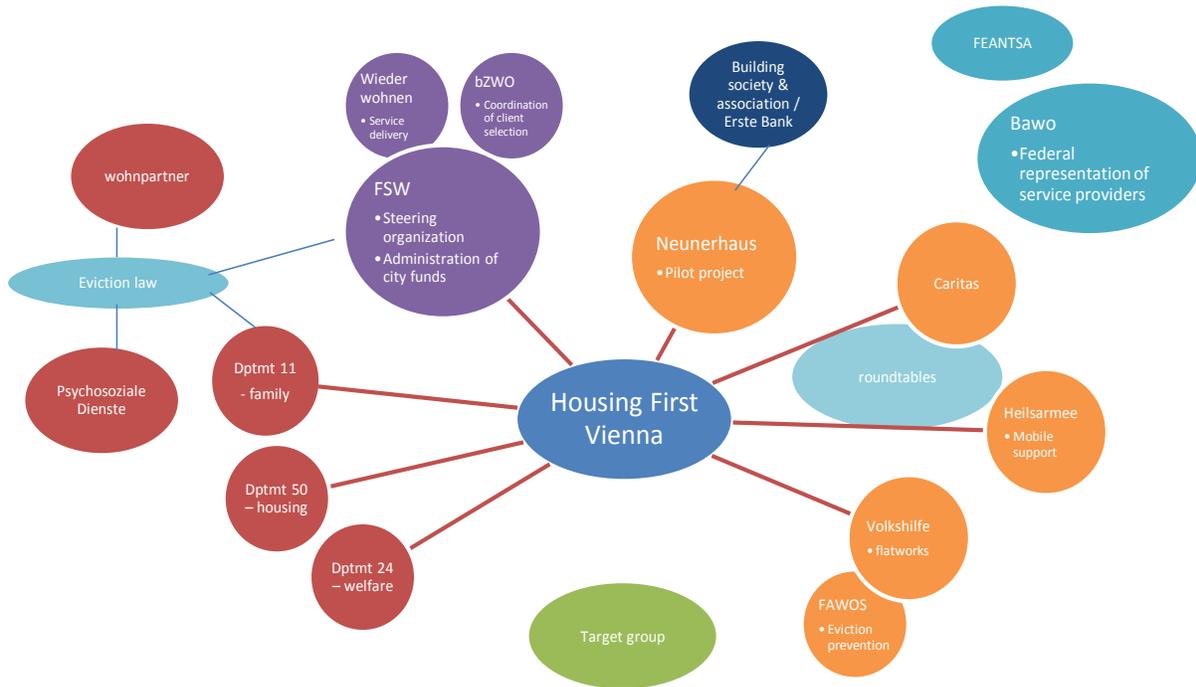
## 6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

The central actors with regard to *Housing First* are the outsourced fund for social issues called *Fonds Soziales Wien (FSW)* and *neunerhaus* (see Illustration 1). *FSW* is not only administering the funds for the city and negotiating budgets with social service providers, but is also responsible for further development of strategies and approaches. *FSW* therefore also plays the role as steering organization in the context of *Housing First*. Within the framework of *FSW*, *Beratungszentrum Wohnungslosenhilfe (bzWO)* – the advisory center for the assistance to homeless people – is the coordinating body for the selection of clients and thus also responsible for checking who qualifies for *Housing First*. This central coordination of the publicly funded service spectrum should also contribute to transparency within the sector and make sure that all potential clients find the service that fulfills their needs in the best way. Currently a group is working on the revision of the selection criteria. With its service unit *wieder wohnen*, *FSW* is also itself active in the delivery of *Housing First* services. In the pilot project of *neunerhaus*, current governance relations with the building sector – in particular a building society (*Bausparkasse*) and a building association, which both belong to one of the main business partners of *neunerhaus*, namely *Erste Bank* – have been strengthened based on an advisory committee that has been established for the project.

In the broader administration framework, the project team established rather spontaneous contacts with the *Municipal Department 24 – Health Care and Social Welfare Planning*. These were necessary in order to create sufficient support for the implementation of the pilot project, as well as flexibility in the application of regulations, e.g. in the context of the *needs-oriented guaranteed minimum resources*, the state safety net for which the department is responsible. This could also initiate learning cycles for a subsequent change of processes and regulations in the case that *Housing First* should become mainstreamed. Other municipal department that have already been or will become important for the delivery of *Housing First* services are the *Municipal Department 11* which is responsible for children's, youth and family affairs and *Municipal Department 50*, responsible for housing issues and especially regarding affordable housing, the provision of subsidies for new construction and the definition of entrance criteria for the municipal housing sector. So far, however, there is no systematic co-operation with between *FSW* and *MD 50*. *Housing First* is only one initiative of a broader effort by the city administration to improve the situation of people who are at risk of losing their apartments due to accumulated rent debts. The law on the prevention of evictions, called *Wohnungssicherungsgesetz (WSG)* from 2012 established a co-operation between *MA 11*, *FSW*, the city's service unit for psycho-social services called *Psychosoziale Dienste Wien (PSD)* and *wohnpartner*, the organization running neighborhood centers in communal estates, to prevent evictions especially in this sector. In order to prevent evictions beyond the city's own housing stock, the courts where action of eviction is initiated need to inform the administration before further steps can be taken. To mediate between tenants and house owners, a service unit for the prevention of evictions, called *Fachstelle für Wohnungssicherung (FAWOS)* was established. It is run by *Volkshilfe*, the service provider that developed *FLATworks* as contribution to the *Housing First* policy spectrum, under the commission of

the city. As a general trend it can be observed that the expenses for the prevention of executions increased significantly between 2005 and 2010 but have been slightly decreasing ever since (MA 24 2012, 178-179).

### Illustration 1: Relations of Housing First



With regard to service providers, the discourse on *Housing First* has changed the governance relations in Vienna in two ways: On the one hand, round tables were organized to bring all perspectives together and guarantee a sufficiently transparent process. This has built trust and a common concern for mutual learning. Due to this consensual strategy development, adverse competitive pressure is limited (although competition for additional resources exists independently from innovative strategies in the field). On the other hand, social service providers in the field decided to discuss requirements and possibilities to restructure the housing market in Vienna. The results were published in a joint position paper (see *Dachverband der Wiener Sozialeinrichtungen* 2013). Within the field of social service providers, however, players have quite differentiated standings and networks and, thus, also power to influence politics, reaching from big national players like *Caritas* to small local players like *ARGE Wien*. Important players – apart from *neunerhaus* - who are actively participating in the process and who have also developed own services in the context of *Housing First* are *Volkshilfe*, *Caritas* and *Heilsarmee*. In case *Housing First* should become the mainstream approach for giving assistance to homeless people in Vienna, there are plans to create a central platform for the acquisition of apartments, although this idea is contested within the field. While a central platform would provide advantages by approaching housing associations in a more coordinated way and thus also increase efficiency, some organizations are afraid that they would have to contribute established contacts and networks instead of gaining from coordination.

Multi-level governance aspects are relevant in two aspects. On the one hand, there are references to other places and spatial scales, starting with the fact that the origin of the discussion lies in the United States. Moreover, the pilot project of *FSW* was Vienna's contribution to a European research project aimed at promoting the exchange of experiences in Europe. This has contributed to shaping the discourse in Austria.

Also in the development of the concept of *neunerhaus*, the expertise of a German expert has been taken into consideration (see e.g. Busch-Geertsma 2011). The topic of *Housing First* has also been taken up by *bundearbeitsgemeinschaft wohnungslosenhilfe bawo*, the representation of service providers on the federal level, in which one of the *Housing First* team members of *neunerhaus* is actively involved. It has furthermore been a topic of FEANTSA, the *European Federation of National Associations working with the Homeless*. *Housing First* is also connected to the different levels of the welfare state insofar as rent regulations and housing support schemes are also dependent on national politics. Seeing as the mechanism of rent regulation is insufficient for an increasing share of the housing market, which resulted in quickly rising rents in recent years, amendments of these policy areas require lobbying and interventions by the city on the federal level. Also, a potential social right to adequate housing would have to be defined nationally. However, there has not only been no political majority in Austria, but the Austrian government has even been in opposition to establishing this right on the European level. Rather, there is a silent political consensus that all people legally living in Austria need to have access to adequate housing – universal public charity, but no right.

Apart from the integration of a specific clause in the government agreement as the important trigger for *Housing First*, politics does not play a central role in the implementation stage of the pilot project. While the *Greens* are still supporting *Housing First* as a programmatic idea, the *Social-democrats* are waiting for the results of evaluations and define their final position at a later point in time. *Housing First* in Vienna seems to be an evidence-based consensual policy field. While politics have taken a quiet position voluntarily, clients' involvement was - according to one interviewee - simply forgotten in the strategy development phase. Afterwards, in the implementation stage *neunerhaus* decided to choose a soft approach to participation, i.e. leave it basically to the clients whether they would like to get involved. There is a feeling, though, that room for individual participation is limited due to the difficulties of clients to cope with everyday challenges. Individual empowerment would in principle open space for strategies of collective participation. However, in contrast to other fields of social work with clients sharing much more clearly defined individual characteristics, collective mobilization is not very common in the field of homelessness, where individual stories do not necessarily share key elements. Although being a desideratum at least for the core actor *FSW*, the whole issue of participation remains more or less unresolved.

## **7 Governance challenges**

### **7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation**

Mainstreaming is an explicit target and the rationale behind the pilot project. The Vienna model of *Housing First* should contribute to the restructuring of giving assistance to the homeless, meaning that in the medium term all clients who qualify for living on their own will be supported. In addition, mainstreaming of the initiative is also very likely due to the coordination of the whole process by the administration and the consensual approach that is being followed. The form of getting service providers involved in the discussion process and the joint acceptance of evidence based policy making is considered a core innovation of *Housing First*. As not all clients qualify for *Housing First*, however, differentiated approaches remain relevant. In the medium term there might emerge a service provision model consisting of three pillars, namely emergency accommodation, permanent and assisted living, and *Housing First* as permanent living in own

apartments. The concrete form of *Housing First*, however, will only take its final shape after the pilot project has been evaluated and the discussion process has been finalized.

However, the discussion on *Housing First* is still a local one. Although there are similar projects going on in other cities and provinces such as St. Pölten (Lower Austria), Salzburg and Upper Austria, they do not seem to be systematically referring to each other. Nonetheless, besides more informal forms of exchange between these local initiatives, there is also a nation-wide operating institution called *bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft wohnungslosenhilfe (bawo)*. It is a knowledge alliance to support the national policy discourse with expertise, e.g. on the requirement of educational standards for people working in the field. Furthermore, it lobbies for adequate funding of assistance to the homeless in all (nine) federal provinces (*Bundesländer*) of Austria. Despite all these coordination efforts, it remains very difficult to nationally mainstream policies, which are in the responsibility of federal provinces. The only powerful tool to foster mainstreaming is additional funding provided at the federal level – a measure which is not probable under the current austerity regime. In Vienna, however, there is a feeling that social issues such as homelessness should become mainstreamed in all policy areas.

## **7.2 Governing welfare mix – avoiding fragmentation**

In general, assistance for the homeless in Vienna is mostly dependent on public funding and the public sector follows a corporatist consensus-oriented logic, even if some private initiatives have been newly established in recent years (i.e. in particular *VinziRast-CortiHaus* and *VinziRast-mittendrin*, a joint initiative by the *Catholic Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*, an Austrian entrepreneur and civil society actor). Due to this important role of the public sector, complete fragmentation is not likely. From an external perspective it seems that at least in the medium term the complexity of service provision should be reduced rather than increasing, at least when all actors in the field are required to follow similar approaches or standards. For the time being, *Housing First* already has the potential to improve coordination and avoid existing fragmentation as all key stakeholders are brought together and a heterogeneous and diversified field strives at becoming more organized. In this regard, social innovation could be seen as strengthening the coordinating role of the public sector<sup>4</sup>. Fragmentation will therefore rather be an issue with regard to differentiations between federal provinces.

The complexity of service delivery itself is relatively limited. In a relatively small setting of core institutions, actors basically need to find an agreement on the distribution of public funds and the best approach to serve the clients. The implementation of *Housing First* in Vienna is, however, dependent on a rather complex policy environment involving housing issues and the organization of transfers – in the Austrian case this particularly refers to the *needs-oriented guaranteed minimum resources (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung)*. Thus, in a broader sense, governance issues involve a national policy framework and its regional or local implementation. Governance complexities on local and regional level might be resolved by ad hoc cooperation within the administration. The governance of policy issues with national contribution is certainly more complex, although at least in pressing cases coordination between regional and national politics is likely. In this regard, however, an issue for service providers remains their representation of civil society and NGOs in the definition and modification of policies.

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<sup>4</sup> That the existing local policy setting is considered incoherent or that some (excluded) groups are better involved or represented than others has at least not been raised in interviews or discussions as essential issues.

### **7.3 Governing welfare mix – developing a participatory governance style**

Participation strategies need to be context sensitive. In the case of homeless people, collective representation confronts serious limitations as compared with other disadvantaged groups. Therefore, collective empowerment of homeless people was not the objective of *Housing First* in Vienna. Neither are there particular process design features pertaining to the participation of these groups, nor are resources provided for their mobilization and training in participatory processes. The establishment of a clients' council was originally foreseen in the pilot project but has not been realized so far. From the perspective of social workers, clients would first have to be empowered individually to articulate their interests and desires before formal participation and collective empowerment are possible. However, participation of homeless became a topic for Vienna's social services for the first time in the discussions about *Housing First*. In a narrow sense, thus, the representation of the poor and excluded is not very strong in the development of *Housing First* in Vienna. The clients' perspectives were at least reflected in evaluations.

With respect to the involved professional stakeholders and the objective of fostering empowerment of the clients, *Housing First* can be considered a type of participatory governance even though, in a narrower sense, excluded groups are not directly participating. However, there are nonetheless ideological differences regarding concrete measures to be taken in order to strengthen the clients' positions. In the case of the pilot project, the whole initiative was taken with the aim of strengthening the position of the target group. For this reason, assistance has been designed in an individualized and life-world oriented manner. Also, social workers may mediate between interests of clients and organizations. Whether this could substitute direct participation of the target group to some extent might depend on specific interests or perspectives. To summarize the tensions with respect to participation: on the one hand direct participation of clients in strategy development seems rather unlikely for the time being as the process has not been set up with this aim in mind; on the other hand, empowerment by individualized services should contribute to the empowerment for participation.

### **7.4 Equality and diversity**

With regard to diversity, the individualization of strategies is the core target of *Housing First*. It should be made sure that all clients receive the form of assistance that serves their needs in the best way. However, some bottlenecks in realizing this are possible. First, a shortage of funding is likely. While for the duration of the pilot project additional funds have been made available for the implementation of an innovative strategy and accompanying evaluations, once the pilot project is finished, financial room to manoeuvre will be shrinking again. Second, as participation was not a core aspect of strategy development, it is likely that approaches are rather based on the problem definition of professional actors than on the perspectives of the target groups themselves. In more practical terms, however, when compared with other policy fields of the welfare state like education or health, where more tensions due to vested interests are likely, solutions might be regarded as relatively undisputed in the field of homelessness as the target group is clearly circumscribed and the first priority – i.e. finding a place to stay or adequate accommodation – is relatively easily defined. In the corporatist Austrian welfare state, non-core policy fields might be more prone to social innovation than the core areas with well-established vested interests.

The *Housing First* approach as experimented with in the pilot project should ensure that individual preferences concerning the type of apartment as well as location and environment are taken into consideration

as much as possible. At the same time, quality and intensity of social work should be agreed upon with clients and therefore be tailor-made for individual needs. Moreover, as the initiative aims at accommodating clients in all housing sectors and all neighborhoods of the city, awareness for these problems should be raised. In principle, all identities should be equally recognized and supported in the context of the project, also by forms of positive discrimination. Nonetheless, one should add that there was quite some skepticism in the ImPProve-focus group when discussing group-specific services, also because personal characteristics may be changing in the course of time (such as singles finding a partner).

With regard to the equality dimension, some service providers have set clear priorities in the process of concept development. The first approach developed by *FSW's* service unit *wieder wohnen* was clearly focused on families with children, although it has been opened for singles and couples in the meantime. *Volkshilfe's* project *FLATworks* is focused on people with a non-Austrian background and must thus be regarded as a form of positive discrimination in order to make the housing market more accessible for people with access problems. In contrast to these initiatives, *neunerhaus* and *Caritas* have left accessibility to the project almost completely open – apart from some psychological criteria. However, the practice of client selection has shown, that at least for the time being, when available places are limited and a possible failing of the project could put the whole initiative at risk, tendencies of creaming are likely.

Nonetheless, due to the structure of assistance for the homeless in Vienna with a central coordination by *FSW* and the selection of clients by *bzWO* there is not only a high chance that services are equally accessible for all social groups but also that most people receive the form of support that meets their needs best. The tension between diversity and equality might be balanced in *Housing First*, if evaluation shows a potential for reducing costs as well as for improving quality by substituting existing shelters for the homeless. As the focus group showed, however, accessibility is insofar restricted as potential clients may be excluded if they have not been living in Vienna. This has been considered a weak point in the focus group, but it was also pointed out that *FSW* is longing for maximum transparency and thus installed a working group for re-negotiating access criteria.

## **7.5 Uneven access**

Policy areas where the key responsibility lies at the provincial level tend to be differentiated, given Austria's constitutional organization as a federal state. In this regard, uneven access to innovative approaches of social policy is not only possible but even likely. And as long as there is no informal transfer or pressure created by the federal level, differentiation is likely to persist, even if some other Austrian cities and federal provinces are experimenting with similar approaches to helping their homeless populations. However, a differentiation of approaches seems justified when context factors differ. Many Austrians (and also Central Europeans) who feel excluded from their community of origin migrate to (foreign) cities, e.g. Vienna, in search of freedom and acceptance of their personal identity. In some cases, people are even expelled from their home countries by legal initiatives banning people from living on the streets as is the case in Hungary.

When the European level is taken into account, this unevenness of accessibility is getting even more distorted, as has been argued in the focus group. Whether the inclusion of housing issues in the definition of universal social rights could change the unevenness of accessibility is doubted, as some form of interpretation and context-sensitivity is required in all cases when implementing social rights.

## **7.6 Avoiding responsibility**

Avoiding responsibility does not seem to be at the heart of the approach followed in Vienna. So far, despite shrinking room to maneuver and in contrast to most other federal provinces, budgets for the assistance for homeless people have not been cut and the responsible head of unit from *FSW* underlined that there are no signs from politics indicating that this will change in the near future. The city still seems prepared to contribute its share and is willing to support innovations that improve the quality of services. Moreover, as cost structures of *Housing First* are clearly favorable as compared with many institutional forms of accommodation, this is also rational from an economic point of view. Therefore, *FSW* has been experimenting with new approaches within its own spectrum of services even before the pilot project started. That the funding of this pilot project was possible at this point in time might also be interpreted as an outcome of changing policy networks and discourses due to the participation of the Greens in the government. This should have opened an additional window of opportunity, at least for the comparatively young service provider *neunerhaus*.

There is an explicit interest of the city to avoid a spatial and/or sectoral concentration of certain groups of tenants, thereby assuming responsibility. The concentration of social problems within this housing sector has become a topic in recent years despite the immense communal housing stock (as compared with other European and North-American metropolises). Increasing the share of disadvantaged groups living in the communal housing sector may therefore rather contribute to a worsening of the situation of clients as well as of other residents. That is why there are efforts to open other housing sectors, for *Housing First* clients, especially the co-operative sector where rents are still comparatively low. *Neunerhaus* has made efforts to get support by private companies which support *Housing First* as part of their strategies of corporate social responsibility. Therefore, the subsidization of the construction of public, social and cooperative housing is a policy area where more could be done by the municipality. In this respect, avoiding responsibility is an issue. Since 1996, Vienna has stopped increasing its municipal housing stock, although the city has started to grow rapidly again. With new public housing and publicly subsidized housing, a share of new apartments could be reserved for *Housing First* clients.

## **7.7 Managing intra-organizational tensions**

Even if the initiative to experiment with *Housing First* came from the management of *neunerhaus*, there were no lasting internal conflicts with social workers reported. Social workers were involved in the conceptualization phase and made themselves heard whenever the flow of information was inadequate or their interests were not sufficiently taken into consideration. Existing conflicts were considered relevant and productive for the development of the pilot project. Regarding other projects like *FLATworks*, it was pointed out that conflicts are a normal spillover whenever major changes are being effectuated. In this regard, there was even a change of head of unit in order to open possibilities for change and overcome organizational resistance when *FLATworks* was being implemented. Tensions within organizations as well as between the contracting entity and service providers were also observed by the employees of *FSW*. However, there was also a feeling that after a first stage of resistance, curiosity soon took over.

Administratively, within *neunerhaus* the pilot project is organized just like all other housing projects. Management aimed at taking especially those employees on board, who were sufficiently flexible and motivated to participate in organizational changes, as procedural changes affect all professions and all levels

of hierarchy within the organization and therefore require a higher degree of flexibility by all persons involved. To compensate for the lack of routine and the higher amount of insecurity faced by project staff, the management of *neunerhaus* also invests more time and effort in this project than in comparable ones. This is justified by the fact that *Housing First* is a special project that resembles the organization's understanding of innovative and emancipatory forms of social work. Whether this leads to conflicts is supposed to depend on available organizational and management capacities. In the interviews, it was explained that the management clearly aims at taking the heat off individual social workers. They also admitted, however, that changing processes require more time than was anticipated.

### **7.8 Enabling legal framework**

Regulations and legal issues have not been a major concern so far. Obviously, the legal framework for giving assistance to homeless people in Vienna is sufficiently flexible for supporting a socially innovative pilot project. Neither the legal form of *neunerhaus* as an organization nor the structure of policy instruments had to be adapted. Just like most social service providers in Austria, *neunerhaus* is still working in the legal form of a non-profit association. The largest share of the budget is support from the public sector and negotiated on an annual basis. For the implementation of the pilot project, additional funds have been provided. The evaluation of the pilot project is negotiated on an individual basis, process-oriented and thus tailor-made for the pilot project. Although representatives of other Housing First projects mentioned that the future basis for evaluations is still unclear, so far evaluations have not been used as a tool to promote competition. In general, competition has not been regarded a major issue as there is a clear political commitment in favor of consensual strategies for the provision of social services in Vienna.

However, competition might become an issue in the medium-term when the mainstreaming of the pilot project and the definition of common standards lead to a larger restructuring of the field and to reallocation of funds. If *Housing First* becomes mainstreamed, the assessment of the legal and institutional settings will clearly change too. This will lead to a larger reorganization not only of the practices of providing services for the homeless. It will also require significant changes in the field of housing policy and the provision of *needs-oriented guaranteed minimum resources (Bedarfsorientierte Mindestsicherung)*. A working group of social service providers deals with the problem of how to promote affordable housing and a close cooperation between *FSW* and the *Municipal Department 24* on questions of required strategy amendment regarding social policies. In addition, some actors desire the development of common standards for social work in the field of homelessness and assisted in order to stabilize qualitative improvements.

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### **Interviews**

- Two representatives of neunerhaus
  - o 21 October 2013, 5.00-7.15pm, neunerHaus Atrium, Margaretenstr. 166, 1050 Wien
- Representative of Caritas
  - o 18 November 2013, 1.00-2.30pm, Wiedner Hauptstraße, 1050 Wien
- Head of wohnungslosenhilfe/representative of Fonds Soziales Wien
  - o 4 December 2013, 2.00-3.30pm, Guglgasse 7-9, 1030 Wien

### **Focus Group**

- Participants: representatives of
  - o Neunerhaus (4)
  - o wieder wohnen
  - o Heilsarmee
  - o Fonds Soziales Wien (2)

- Volkshilfe
- Caritas
- *WU Wien, Welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 Wien, D4.2.213, 31 January 2014, 9.00am-1.00pm*

***Feedback to draft version by focus group participants & interviewees***

- June 2015

***Concluding Interview***

- Representative of neunerhaus
  - *24.6.2015, 9.00-10.00am, WU Wien*

# ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe.

## Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

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