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Cohousing Dynamics in Upper Austria: A Multi-Level-Perspective Analysis

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Abstract

A sustainability transition of the housing sector is crucial to tackle grand challenges such as climate crisis, housing affordability and economic instability. Cohousing initiatives represent a promising pathway within the broader transformation of the built environment (Bianchi & Costa, 2024; Mellner et al., 2021; Tummers, 2016). Their potential, including shared resources, strengthened social cohesion, and support for sustainable mobility, highlights the relevance of this niche innovation in driving systemic change in Austria (Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Wankiewicz, 2015). However, the quantification and analysis of niche diffusion processes have yet to be documented in the cohousing context in Upper Austria.

This master's thesis aims to contribute to the description of the Austrian cohousing sector and its potential for a sustainability housing transition. The conceptual foundation is the Multi-Level-Perspective (MLP) framework, which is widely applied in scholarship for transition studies of socio-technical systems (Deviney et al., 2023; Kanger, 2021; Smith et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2022). A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed to map cohousing dynamics in the context of Upper Austria and to understand scaling and replication processes. The findings include 31 established, discontinued or initiating cohousing projects, characterized by a declining regional proliferation. Main institutional barriers are political resistance and cultural dominance of single-family home ownerships, while institutional enablers (e.g. municipal support) remain highly place dependent. Niche scaling strategies range from conflict resolution and networking to educational work and age diversity within the project, while primary replication enablers include professionalised cohousing networks, subsidies and beneficial land allocation policies.

Keywords: cohousing, sustainability transition, socio-technical systems, multi-level-perspective (MLP), social innovation, Upper Austria

Kurzfassung

Ein Wandel im Wohnungssektor ist entscheidend für die Bewältigung großer Herausforderungen wie der Klimakrise, der Bezahlbarkeit von Wohnraum und wirtschaftlicher Instabilität. Cohousing-Initiativen stellen einen vielversprechenden Ansatz im Rahmen einer nachhaltigen Transformation der bebauten Umwelt dar (Bianchi & Costa, 2024; Mellner et al., 2021; Tummers, 2016). Ihr Potenzial, darunter gemeinsame Ressourcennutzung, gestärkter sozialer Zusammenhalt und die Förderung nachhaltiger Mobilität, unterstreicht die Relevanz dieser Nischeninnovation für einen systemischen Wandel in Österreich (Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Wankiewicz, 2015). Eine Quantifizierung und Analyse von Nischenverbreitungsprozessen im Cohousing-Kontext in Oberösterreich liegen jedoch bislang nicht vor.

Diese Masterarbeit zielt darauf ab, zur Beschreibung des österreichischen Cohousing-Sektors und seines Potenzials für einen nachhaltigen Wohnungswandel beizutragen. Die konzeptionelle Grundlage bildet das Multi-Level-Perspective (MLP)-Framework, das in der Wissenschaft für Transformationsstudien soziotechnischer Systeme weit verbreitet ist (Deviney et al., 2023; Kanger, 2021; Smith et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2022). Eine Kombination aus qualitativen und quantitativen Forschungsmethoden wurde eingesetzt, um die Cohousing-Dynamik im Kontext von Oberösterreich abzubilden und Skalierungs- sowie Replikationsprozesse zu verstehen. Die Ergebnisse umfassen 31 etablierte, eingestellte oder entstehende Cohousing-Projekte, welche durch eine eher langsame regionale Verbreitung gekennzeichnet sind. Die wichtigsten institutionellen Hindernisse sind politischer Widerstand und die kulturelle Dominanz des Einfamilienhausbesitzes, während institutionelle Förderfaktoren (z. B. Unterstützung durch Gemeinden) nach wie vor stark ortsabhängig sind. Nischen-Skalierungsstrategien reichen von Konfliktlösung und Vernetzung bis hin zu Aufklärungsarbeit und Altersvielfalt innerhalb des Projekts, während zu den primären Replikationsförderfaktoren professionalisierte Cohousing-Netzwerke, finanzielle Unterstützung und vorteilhafte Grundstückszuteilungsrichtlinien zählen.

Schlagwörter: Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen, Wandel zur Nachhaltigkeit, soziotechnische Systeme, Multi-Level-Perspektive (MLP), soziale Innovation, Oberösterreich

1. Introduction

Rising concerns over multiple crises, including climate crises, housing affordability as well as economic instability, impact our modern ways of living, which contributes to a growing interest in developing a more socially, ecologically and economically sustainable housing system (Tummers, 2016; Vergara-Perucich, 2025). Sustainability transitions of socio-technical systems tackle these grand challenges and generate radical change (Geels, 2019). In this context, co-housing is often suggested as an alternative housing form with the potential to meet these challenges (Bianchi & Costa, 2024; Tummers, 2016).

Today, the housing crisis in Austria and Europe include the rise of housing affordability challenges with high rental costs, and an increase of property costs and energy prices. A study of Matějková & Tichá (2025) analysed price-to-income and rent-to-income ratios and identified affordability patterns and disparities. While Vienna shows better affordability due to higher average wages, other Central European countries found to have worse income-rent-ratios. The authors highlight the importance of direct housing policies and wage interventions to tackle housing challenges, while cross-country governance and regional cooperation is crucial to enhance housing affordability across Central Europe (ibid.). Another crucial aspect of housing in Austria concerns massive land-use changes due to urban sprawl leading to a decline in ecosystem services in the lowlands of Austria driving climate crises (Schirpke et al., 2023).

Therefore, collaborative housing strategies present a promising way to counteract the aforementioned sustainability challenges (Bianchi & Costa, 2024; Tummers, 2016). With the analysis of carbon and ecological footprint of eco-villages and cohousing projects, the study of Daly (2017) underscores that progress towards ecological sustainability at a community scale is indicated and the trend to reduce environmental impact was identified. Furthermore, it was shown that collaborative housing benefits people's health and well-being by a mix of components such as community living, participation, legal and economic aspects (Reyes et al., 2022). The study also highlights the socio-economic benefits of cohousing such as offering flexible and below-market rents which increases financial stability of inhabitants. Additionally, collective ownership structures help to reduce individual economic risks and challenges the speculative housing practices (ibid.). The concept of 'grassroot innovation' gained attention as a driver of sustainable change (Smith & Seyfang, 2013), with collaborative housing initiatives increasingly

recognized as grassroot innovation contributing to the transition of the building sector (Hirschberg et al., 2022).

The systematic review of Lang et al. (2020), including 195 papers about collaborative housing, identified a research gap in the quantification and mapping efforts of the various cohousing models across Europe. The authors further found a necessity for examining the potential diffusion of alternative housing practices from niche into the mainstream housing system (ibid.). To the author's knowledge, no quantitative mapping of cohousing projects in Upper Austria nor analysis of scaling processes existed. Furthermore, Smith & Seyfang (2013) argue that there is a necessity for research on the operation and diffusion of grassroot innovator networks, as well as the process of replication and upscaling of innovations.

According to the stated research problem and the state of literature, following research question was formulated: 'How can cohousing projects in Upper Austria contribute to a sustainability transition in Austrias' housing sector and what conditions are required to scale up their environmental, social and economic benefits within the region?'

This research draws primarily on Vestbros' (2000) and Babos' et al. (2020) characterisations of collaborative housing and uses the term *cohousing* as overarching term for the analysis of Upper Austrian cases. In accordance with the GO4CO (Governance for Cohousing) research group, this study aims to contribute to the description of the Austrian cohousing sector and its potential for a sustainability housing transition (Institute für Wohnbauforschung, 2026). To answer the research question, a mixed-methods research design was established. Qualitative research includes expert interviews, a video analysis as well as site visits and aim to identify *how* collaborative housing projects generate sustainability benefits and *what* conditions are necessary for scaling them up. In addition, a quantitative mapping approach to map and describe the typology of cohousing projects in Upper Austria to contextualize and supplement qualitative insights.

The multi-level-perspective (MLP) framework was used as conceptual foundation for this study to analyse the sustainability transition of the housing sector and to understand under what conditions niche practices diffuse. The framework is widely applied in academic scholarship to analyse transitions within socio-technical systems, including mobility, energy and housing (Deviney et al., 2023; Kanger, 2021; Smith et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2022). Its levels are the

niche, the regime and the landscape, which organise the analysis of sustainability transitions in socio-technical systems (Geels, 2019). The interplay between these levels defines the characteristics of transitions, which are long-term and non-linear (ibid.). Critics claim limited integration of power relations (Avelino, 2017; Smith et al., 2010), lack of agency (Keller et al., 2022) and limited geographical perspectives on transitions within the MLP (Coenen et al., 2012; Raven et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2025). However, this thesis is integrating geographical aspects by analysing the socio-spatial context of cohousing and further addresses power relations in the analysed region. Despite its criticism the framework provides a holistic device to explore the complexity of the housing sector.

The short research duration of a master's thesis is limiting the in-depth investigation. However, expert interviews, project visits, desktop research and a video analysis in seven months led to a holistic view of the cohousing landscape in Upper Austria. Furthermore, the geographical scope and context of this study is tied to the region of Upper Austria. Empirical results of transition studies are context sensitive and place dependent (Coenen et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2025). This place dependency must be considered for future research on the cohousing landscape in other regional contexts. Important to remark are the dynamic aspects of the cohousing landscape, including constant initiation and discontinuation of projects. Due to time and resource limitations the map includes only projects which were accessible for the author in the time of research from August 2025 to February 2026.

The next chapter describes the theoretical and conceptual background, including the definition of cohousing and the conceptual MLP framework. It also provides a description of the socio-technical housing system in the context of Upper Austria. Chapter 3 establishes the methodologies, including the detailed research procedure of the qualitative and quantitative methods. Chapter 0 presents, analyses and discusses the results, while chapter 0 summarizes the results, highlights important findings, and provides future research recommendations.

2. Concepts and Theories

2.1 The Concept and Definition of Cohousing

‘The landscape of collaborative housing projects in Europe is diverse. For this reason, it is not possible to describe one single applicable process or provide recommendations that apply to all approaches in the same way’ (CO-HOPE, 2025: 6). Therefore, this research draws on a variety of different approaches to develop the basis for inclusion criteria for the mapping of cohousing projects. The concept of cohousing as an alternative community model was first reconceptualized and given contemporary relevance by McCamant & Durret (1994) in their foundational book on the subject. The authors conduct case studies to explain origin and elements of collaborative housing, describe its environmental impact and strategies for the concept to spread (ibid.). The critical review of cohousing research conducted by Tummers (2016) highlights that each discipline has another conceptualisation of cohousing. In general, self-initiated clustered housing, with individual and shared spaces, is seen as a way of making otherwise unaffordable or inaccessible services, such as care for very young and ageing persons, gardens, playgrounds, and child-friendly environments, available. In addition, this research draws on Babos' et al. (2020) sharing-based categorization of cohousing, which includes the shared creation, shared tenure and shared activities in the field of housing. This stands in opposition to individual housing, reflecting individuals or traditional family compositions, which use private entrances and do not possess sharing methods with others. To differ the various forms of cohousing, Vestbro (2000) has given oversight as following (see Table 1):

Table 1

Proposal of different types of cohousing (Vestbro, 2000)

Co-housing	Housing with common space and shared facilities
Collaborative housing	Housing oriented towards collaboration by residents
Collective housing	Emphasising the collective organisation of services in housing
Communal housing	Housing for togetherness and sense of community
Commune	Living without individual apartment

Cooperative housing	Cooperative ownership without common spaces or shared facilities, therefore not co-housing

Based on the proposal of Vestbro (2000) to define different types of cohousing, this thesis takes the terms of *collaborative housing, collective housing* and *communal housing* into account, using *cohousing* as umbrella term to describe the Upper Austrian cases analysed. Communes and cooperative housing forms are not included for this definition (Tummers, 2016). However, various developments within cohousing are considered, even if residents for example do not eat together every week or have not been initiators of the project themselves but do share other essential characteristics (Fromm, 2012).

In the German-speaking context cohousing is often referring to terms such as "Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen", "Partizipatives Wohnen", "Wohnprojekte" or "Baugruppen". According to the literature the innate idea of cohousing projects is the combination of self-contained apartments and shared spaces such as a communal kitchen, garden or workshop spaces, depending on the financial possibilities and personal requirements and preferences (Bamford, 2001; Fromm, 2000; Jarvis, 2011; Vestbro, 2000; Wonneberger, 2018). The members develop principles for living together as well as an administrative and organisational structure. These principles most often include supporting each other with everyday needs from helping with groceries to childcare (Wonneberger, 2018). In general, cohousing projects are seen to be a solution for unaffordable or inaccessible services, such as care structures for young and the elderly, off-grid and sustainable energy systems, child-friendly environment and car or equipment sharing and so on (Tummers, 2016). The size can vary from a handful households to more than 100 (Bamford, 2001). Drawing on Wankiewicz (2015), the communities are organized to (self)manage their own structures, based on a shared interest in living together sustainably and with self-determination.

2.1.1 Cohousing in Europe and Austria

Several scholars have discussed the re-emergence of the concept of cohousing (Rafael Sosa-Ramírez et al., 2024; Tummers, 2016; Vestbro, 2000). Studies have pointed out the various positive impacts of cohousing such as health benefits (Carrere et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2022), the prevention of loneliness (Glass & Norris, 2023), social cohesion and neighbourhood development (Fromm, 2012; Leutgöb & Weiser, 2025) as well as positive environmental effects

(Daly, 2017). The study of Hagbert et al. (2020) conducted in-depth research in four major European cities to understand and contextualize cohousing in the European sustainability discourse and its policies. The authors argue that alternative housing initiatives carry significant transformative potential, both at the individual and societal level. Collaborative housing projects often embody values such as sustainability, community, sharing, and social equity, challenging the commodification of housing that prevails in mainstream markets. Furthermore, the book stresses the need for critical reflection to not reproduce structural inequalities (e.g. access only for privileged groups) and the authors call for stronger connections between, policy, research and practice (ibid.).

Rooted in the collective movements of the late 1960s, cohousing emerged in Denmark in the early 1970s as a form of low-rise, densely clustered residential development (Beck, 2020). The American architects McCamant and Durrett, who mainly developed and spread the term cohousing, have noted that Denmark continues to set the benchmark for cohousing worldwide (McCamant & Durret, 2011). The model spread to other European countries including Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, where cohousing projects have similarly deep historical roots, though they differ somewhat from the Danish model in terms of typology, physical form, and organizational structure (Vestbro, 2000). In 2010, the first ever international conference on cohousing was held in Sweden (Hagbert et al., 2020).

In Germany a diverse range of cohousing projects has developed, driven in part by the state's significant withdrawal from the private housing funding policy, as well as broader shifts in societal values and lifestyles (Droste, 2015). Today, over a thousand such projects, primarily led by resident groups, can be found across both urban and rural areas of the country (ibid.). In both Germany and Austria, “Baugruppen” (building groups) are self-organised groups of owner-occupiers that develop their own concepts for need-oriented, often socially innovative forms of living (ibid.). Therefore, this thesis uses the term *building groups*.

In Austria, a new housing type was developing in the 1970s as an alternative to standardized mass housing production from the postwar years, originating in Styria’s social housing sector. With participatory housing projects and the combination of reform-minded politicians and architects eager to experiment, Styria is considered as cradle to collaborative and participative housing in Austria, establishing the German term “Partizipativer Wohbau” (participatory housing) (Jany, 2019). Moreover, Freisiter et al. (1987) documented cohousing and participatory

projects across Austria in the late 1980s, including several projects in the region of Upper Austria. In this context, the authors introduced the term "Mitbestimmung im Wohnbau" (Participation in housing development) to conceptually capture the emergence of this phenomenon (ibid.). Furthermore, Wankiewicz (2015) analysed the potential of cohousing in rural Austria. Her findings reveal that mainstream planning practices and subsidies must be tailored to the needs of cohousing groups and their residents, who are among the most vulnerable group in the building system (ibid.). Similarly, Lang & Stoeger (2018) discuss the role of the local institutions in Austria, claiming that local authorities and partnerships with cooperatives are crucial for the establishment of cohousing initiatives.

2.2 The Multi-Level-Perspective framework

This thesis uses the multi-level-perspective (MLP) as theoretical-conceptual framework to analyse the sustainability transition of the housing sector and to understand under what conditions niche practices diffuse. This chapter introduces the framework's position in innovation studies, and explores its criticism, challenges and potential for this analysis.

2.2.1 Development and characteristics

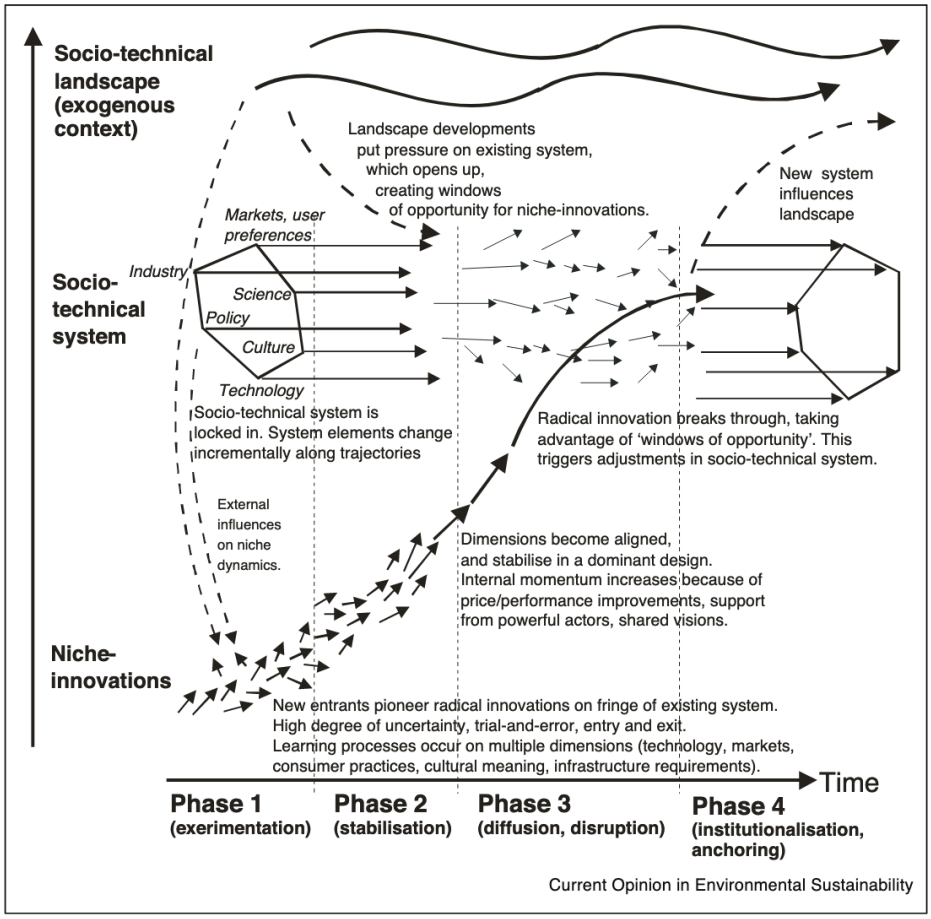
The MLP originated from an examination of the evolutionary process of technological adaptation to societal needs within socio-technical systems. The framework focuses on the co-evolution of social, technological, institutional and economic changes, drawing insights from innovation studies, evolutionary economics, the sociology of innovation, and the history of technology (Geels, 2002, 2005, 2019). Historically, it is shown that successful transitions are facilitated by aligning the aims and behaviours of the three levels of the MLP (Deviney et al., 2023). These are the niche, the regime and the landscape which organise the analysis of sustainability transitions in socio-technical systems (Geels, 2019). Niches are seen as 'protected spaces' which offer room for learning processes and where new entrepreneurial innovations are developed that aim to transform the given system (Geels, 2011: 27). Regimes are dominant ways of doing, stabilized by rules, infrastructure, institutions and incumbent actors (Geels, 2005, 2019). They consist of sub-regimes such as science, culture, markets, industry and policy and form the structure of an existing socio-technical system to guarantee its stability (ibid.). Finally, the landscape level comprises processes such as environmental and demographic changes, growing social movements, shifts in political ideology or economic structures and cultural evolution. These

changes create pressure for disruption at the regime level, while the regime's responses can generate opportunities for niches to become established within the socio-technical regime (Smith et al., 2010). Therefore, the interplay between these processes defines the characteristics of transitions, which are long-term and non-linear. Although transitions vary from country to country and from sector to sector, Geels defines the general dynamics of the MLP levels as follows: '(a) niche-innovations gradually build up internal momentum, (b) niche-innovations and landscape changes create pressure on the system and regime, and (c) destabilization of the regime creates windows of opportunity for niche-innovations, which then diffuse and disrupt the existing system' (Geels, 2019: 190).

Figure 1 shows the time it takes for niche-innovations to diffuse into the socio-technical regime related to interactions between the levels. Geels (2019) defined four phases of the innovation process: experimentation, stabilization, diffusion and anchoring or institutionalisation. While external influences shape the first phase of niche experiments, landscape development puts pressure on the regime, weakening its stability. At the same time, niche innovation stabilises into a dominant design. Radical innovation can then break through, triggering adjustments in the regime. This leads to the development of a new order in the socio-technical regime, which then influences the landscape. An important factor influencing the pathway of a transition is the different properties of the niche, regime and landscape at a given point in time. If, for example, a landscape pressure disrupts the regime and opens up opportunities, while niche innovations are not yet fully developed, integration into the regime cannot proceed (Kanger, 2021). Other influencing factors are the intensity of landscape pressures and regime resilience (ibid.).

Figure 1

Multi-level perspective on socio-technical transition (Geels, 2019: 191)



2.2.2 Criticism and Allure

Smith et al. (2010) identify conceptual challenges in the framework when it comes to addressing agency, power dynamics, and geography. This section addresses criticism of the MLP and simultaneously explains why this framework is used to analyse the diffusion of niche innovation in the housing sector.

The analytical strategy of the MLP is to follow innovation trajectories, which means that the analysis of socio-technical systems includes several groups or dimensions. Therefore, the analysis intrinsically includes various actors, socio-cultural and political struggles (Geels, 2019). Fair criticism of socio-technical system analysis claims the neglect of focus on 'distribution systems' such as the tax system or labour markets (Røpke, 2016: 240) and a lack of social focus instead of a technical one (Keller et al., 2022). This study analyses a system of provision, such as those relating to housing, energy or transport (Geels, 2002). Since the MLP focuses on these systems, the framework is highly suitable for this thesis. Furthermore, recent literature does

also emphasize the increased usage of MLP for 'transformations towards ecological and social sustainability' (Keller et al., 2022: 15).

In terms of agency, the MLP is criticised for over emphasizing the niche-level actors while simultaneously neglecting the resistance of incumbent actors and the ways structural power relations can impede transition. While this analysis acknowledges its limitation, it uses the core MLP levels to organize the data and showcase the narrative of transformative change. However, this thesis draws on newer versions of MLP that explicitly include regime resistance and power relations into the analysis of change (Avelino, 2017; Ford & Newell, 2021; Geels, 2019). At the same time, Keller et al. (2022) argue that the role of the individual agency in transitions is neglected. The authors mention that the users and consumers (e.g. residents) are often seen as passive end-users rather than active participants (ibid.). The thesis overcomes this criticism with analysing the resident's perspective and including their point of view into the discussion. Overall, a bibliometric analysis of the MLP transition research found a high proliferation of MLP studies in general, and that the focus on agency, power and policy is increasing (Wang et al., 2022). This demonstrates that the MLP is developing and evolving in a dynamic way.

Key criticism of the MLP points out that the framework historically lacked a clear spatial or geographical dimension (Smith et al., 2010). However, niches and regimes often operate at different scales. Regimes are not only "national", while they are constituted from local, regional and global elements. Socio-technical systems are territorially embedded, and the geographically uneven transition of these systems is shaped by actor networks operating across different scales within regional and national networks (Coenen et al., 2012b). Lawhon and Murphy (2012) argue that socio-technical transition frameworks are particularly useful for human geographers when it comes to understanding the co-evolution of technology and society, including the dynamic interactions of different political, social, and economic scales. However, they acknowledge that these frameworks are only valuable, if they overcome their shortcomings and become more sensitive to the role of geographical and spatial factors (Lawhon & Murphy, 2012). Therefore, the analysis of this study draws on literature concerning the geography of socio-technical transitions to integrate the socio-spatial perspective (Coenen et al., 2012; Lawhon & Murphy, 2012; Raven et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2025).

While critiques point out missing details, the strength of the MLP lies in its broad and integrative nature allowing a multi-dimensional analysis. It should be viewed as a heuristic device

rather than a rigid model, that guides the attention of the analyst to relevant questions and interesting patterns (Geels, 2011). The framework is a middle-range theory that bridges the gap between grand theories and micro theories and therefore allows to analyse how individual co-housing projects (niche) are constrained by national codes (regime) and environmental crisis (landscape) (Geels, 2011). To explore the complexity of the housing sector the MLP was chosen as theoretical framework to look at the interplay between these different dimensions.

2.3 Socio-technical Transition of the Housing Sector

Socio-technical transitions are considered as deep structural changes within systems such as transportation, energy, food or other systems (Geels, 2011). They are defined as long-term shifts (lasting 50 years or more) from one socio-technical system to another (Geels, 2002). A system is a configuration of actors, rules and technologies that fulfils a certain societal function encompassing science, engineering, the economy, policy, culture and everyday life (Geels, 2005). Importantly, the function of socio-technical systems such as housing includes the determination of what goods and services are provided and who is able to access them (Røpke, 2016).

2.3.1 The Socio-technical System

A socio-technical system of housing provision, for instance, involves a particular configuration of interacting elements such as real estate markets, building infrastructure and technologies, land and finance, planning rules, developer practices and residents routines, as well as cultural meanings of home (Keller et al., 2022).

Landscape

Landscape pressures on housing systems are found in the political-economic context, ideology, culture or the globalization of finance (Lawson, 2010; Stephens, 2020; Werner, 2025). Stephens (2020) discusses labour-capital power balance, (neo)liberalism and welfare regimes as overarching structures which influence the housing regime. For instance, low interest rates and unorthodox monetary policy is driving financialization of housing (ibid.). Demographic changes such as population growth are a key pressure to influence shifts in the housing regime (Werner, 2025). Furthermore, armed conflicts such as World War II shifted priorities in Austria to rapid reconstruction and mass production, before moving to a more quality-oriented housing policy starting in the 1970s (ibid.).

Today, even welfare states such as Austria face housing shortage and affordability crisis (Förster et al., 2020). However, values of property ownership for individual economic stability dominates in Austria and the state's strategy still comprises economic liberalism and ownership laws. This is also demonstrated by the high number of dwellings in private ownership with 51.1% in Upper Austria (Statistik Austria, 2026a). In general, the population is growing in Upper Austria (Statistik Austria, 2026b) and the number of single households is increasing (Statistik Austria, 2026c).

Regime

In general, the housing sector operates primarily at the regime level, often with a highly institutionalised force that entrenches a conservative ideology and hinders sustainable building practices (Foong et al., 2017). The housing regime describes dominant tenures, institutions and regulatory logics. The regulation of rents, the social housing stock and subsidies are shaping a country's housing system (Stephens, 2020). Tummers (2016) states that the European system in the 21st-century is primarily made up of individual owner-occupied suburban households. This is deeply embedded in planning culture and practice. For example, plots and building materials are standardised for single-family houses, and transportation policies and legal and financial instruments are adapted for private concerns (ibid.). Furthermore, European governments are expanding housing supplies by focusing increasingly on private-sector actors due to budget cuts and EU-imposed constraints (Van Bortel & Gruis, 2019). Key regime actors involve housing providers, private investors, urban planners, landowners and governments shaping the rules of the system (Lawson, 2010; Wolfgring & Peverini, 2024).

Socio-technical transition literature assumes formal and institutionalized regimes. However, in some contexts the housing sector consists of informal regimes such as unwritten standards or unofficial markets. These can be highly resilient and difficult to target with conventional policy. This, again, highlights the importance of recognizing socio-cultural, socio-economic and geographical contexts (Keller et al., 2022). Furthermore, the integration of finance into the multi-level perspective, as suggested by Geddes & Schmidt (2020), implies to see finance as part of the regime to analyse niche-finance interactions. This is highly relevant to housing, where mortgage markets, speculation and public finance strongly influence transformative potential (Lawson, 2010). However, when it comes to housing affordability, Austria's housing model has been mentioned as a best-practice example by combining social housing structures with progressive wage policy (Matějková & Tichá, 2025).

In Austria, the governance and finance of housing is divided between national, regional and local levels. While there is no national housing law, each federal state is responsible for its own construction and housing regulations. In Upper Austria the Housing Act of 1994 applies, including subsequently enacted regulations (Baurecht und Bauordnungen, 2025).

Niche

When the innovation breaks out of the niche and enters the mainstream to compete with existing housing forms and foster wider changes in the regime, this is the crucial part of innovation system transitions (Geels, 2005). Smith argues that niche practices therefore must be flexible to adapt to the mainstream context (Smith, 2007). In terms of alternative housing models, Austria has a well-established tradition of housing cooperatives and non-profit housing actors, which, however, must be differentiated from collaborative housing models (see 2.1) (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). However, with Vienna being pioneer in Austria, collaborative housing projects have gained attention and grew in number over the past years (Butzlaff et al., 2025). Another study shows that cohousing as niche innovation is increasing across Europe and beyond (Lang, Carriou, et al., 2020).

The potential and effects of cohousing initiatives on people and the environment is described in several academic studies (Bamford, 2001; Carrere et al., 2020; Daly, 2017; Fromm, 2012; Reyes et al., 2022; Wankiewicz, 2015). The systematic review of Daly (2017) quantifies the environmental impact of cohousing communities. The author found that a 'combination of physical design, strong social capital, and shared principles and goals of reduced environmental impact' helped to establish sustainable practices within the community Daly (2017: 25).

Smith (2007) analyses the influence of green niches on the socio-technical regimes, arguing that intermediate initiatives – projects with mutual adaptation of niche and regime – possess the highest potential to change guiding principles and approaches (second-order learning). In contrast, more radical niche experiments change first-order learning, i.e. specific sustainability practices. Boyer (2013) argues that this 'intermediacy' is necessary but insufficient for sustainable housing communities to grow and influence the mainstream policy making. According to Boyer (2013), influential communities gain influence by adapting some of the rules of the regime and demonstrating their feasibility to mainstream institutional actors.

The core actors in the cohousing niche are mainly resident groups, representing grassroot innovators who experiment with new sustainable practices (Czischke, 2018). Furthermore,

intermediaries, such as cohousing professionals (planners, process managers, group facilitators) act as 'middle agent' between niche and mainstream (Arrigoitia & Tummers, 2019), while broader intermediary organisations build cohousing networks to consolidate sustainable practices within the niche by lobbying the state or managing funding (Lang, Chatterton, et al., 2020). Non-profit or limited-profit housing providers, municipal agents as well as private property owner are potential niche actors that facilitate the proliferation of cohousing (Czischke, 2018; Lawson, 2010).

2.3.2 The Geography of Transition

The criticism of the MLP framework points out the importance of conceptualizing the spatial scale in socio-technical transition studies (see 3.2.2). However, there is a growing body of literature including the socio-spatial perspective into transition research (Ribeiro et al., 2025). Socio-technical systems are territorially embedded and the geographically uneven transition of these systems is shaped by actor networks operating across different scales (Coenen et al., 2012). Niches do not explicitly function at the local level, while regimes may also be transnational in terms of institutions, economics or technologies which constitute it, or conversely remain regional in their spatial scale (Raven et al., 2012). A recent study, which reviewed academic research on the geography of transition from 1995 – 2024, revealed a lack of spatial aspects in sustainability transition research (Ribeiro et al., 2025). The authors advocate for an integration of more spatially inclusive approaches including geographical perspectives (ibid.). This perspective is based on the theoretical background of regional studies and economic geography, combining the discussion of regional diversification with an understanding of the nature and spatiality of innovations to comprehend geographical inequalities (Binz et al., 2020). Furthermore, a case study in socio-technical transition theory research highlights the necessity of working within a regional context to incorporate the socio-spatial aspects of transitions (Foong et al., 2017).

Importantly, MLP levels do not necessarily align at the geographical scales; rather, they are related to the social role of the actor's network in a socio-technical system. However, critics argue that the MLP could benefit from integrating a multi-scalar approach to its concept (Coenen et al., 2012).

2.4 Replication and Upscaling

This chapter reviews the literature on replication and scaling practices relating to the interaction between niche and regime, based on landscape pressures, with the aim of integrating cohousing into the existing housing regime. One of the key challenges is to understand the integration of innovation into the mainstream and its potential effects. For instance, policymakers must be convinced to adapt legal framework, consumers and users need to be informed about new practices and its benefits, and markets must develop accordingly (Deviney et al., 2023). Smith & Seyfang (2013) argue that the diffusion of innovation requires its re-contextualisation in new environments. For example, the diffusion of skills was crucial for an eco-house experiment. When niche experiments are replicated, it is not only material objects that are reproduced by grassroot actors, but also a substantial knowledge base for sustainability challenges, even if policymaker only use or ignore parts of it. Furthermore, personal and cultural capacities are built during the scaling process (Smith & Seyfang, 2013). Westley & Antadze (2010) demonstrate how social innovation scales through institutional transformation, which is deeply shaped by context, timing and circumstances. Therefore, innovations emerge in response to social needs and may be delayed to until conditions are favourable. Whether social innovation can be replicated to achieve broader impact depends on the interplay of political, social, economic, and cultural factors, as well as the existing frameworks and opportunities available at the time of its diffusion (ibid.).

Based on Geels' framework and the four phases of a transition process (see Figure 1), the third phase represents the scaling and diffusion of niche innovation into the mainstream markets (Geels, 2019). This occurs under the influence of drivers such as price-performance improvements or support from influential stakeholders. This phase is characterized by struggles between the niche and the regime, involving economic, political and cultural dimensions. The latter includes discussions of problem and solution framing, while political agenda settings and adjustments in regulations and the region's economic influence the scaling process (Geels, 2019).

2.4.1 Barriers and constraints on upscaling

There are numerous guidelines and handbooks about cohousing that propose guidance and considerable information about current trends and practices in the field (Tummers, 2016). However, even if it is acknowledged that every project is unique, during the planning and scaling process similar challenges are identified. This involves for example the attainment of land, group formation, planning permission or financial difficulties (ibid.). Furthermore, Smith &

Seyfang (2013) argue that land ownership structures often impede the process of sustainability initiatives, forcing grassroot groups to the margins, e.g. outside the city or province, where constraints are fewer, but resources are lower. Furthermore, another study discusses the question of 'what barriers need to be addressed to create socio-technical transitions to sustainable building?' (Foong et al., 2017: 7). The authors identify a lack of awareness among developers and consumers, high cost as obstacle to sustainable building, lack of accountability of stakeholders and low trust between actors and other barriers as impediment to sustainable building at the regional scale (Foong et al., 2017).

Different types of regime resistance and power struggles are another key barrier (Geels, 2019). Drawing on insights from political economy, the resistance of incumbent actors is demonstrated through power relations between firms, the policy stakeholders, as well as established and newer policy framings. The outcomes of policy change are shaped by frameworks that give certain groups greater access to decision-makers than others. Hence, Geels (2019) argues that changes in policymaking involve balancing power relations.

Considering 'Living Lab' conditions, Dijk, et al. (2019) propose five constraints on upscaling in social innovation experiments and ways to overcome them. These are also reflected in the challenges of upscaling proposed by Geels (2019) and can be related to cohousing innovation. While the importance of learning in experiments is recognized, participants often have a limited understanding of the innovation process, missing out real life opportunities to scale up as a result. Furthermore, experiments should not be designed in isolation without taking real social, economic or political conditions into account. Even if in that case participants realise a positive outcome within the experimental conditions, the broader public is unlikely to share their views. Geels mentions the 'liability of newness', whereby an experiment is seen as strange or unfamiliar (Geels, 2019: 190). Consequently, the outcome of the experiment does not reflect policies and institutions may be unwilling to adopt. Dijk et al. (2019) also mention the difficulty of coordinating different stakeholders and fragmented cooperations.

2.4.2 Niche-regime interactions

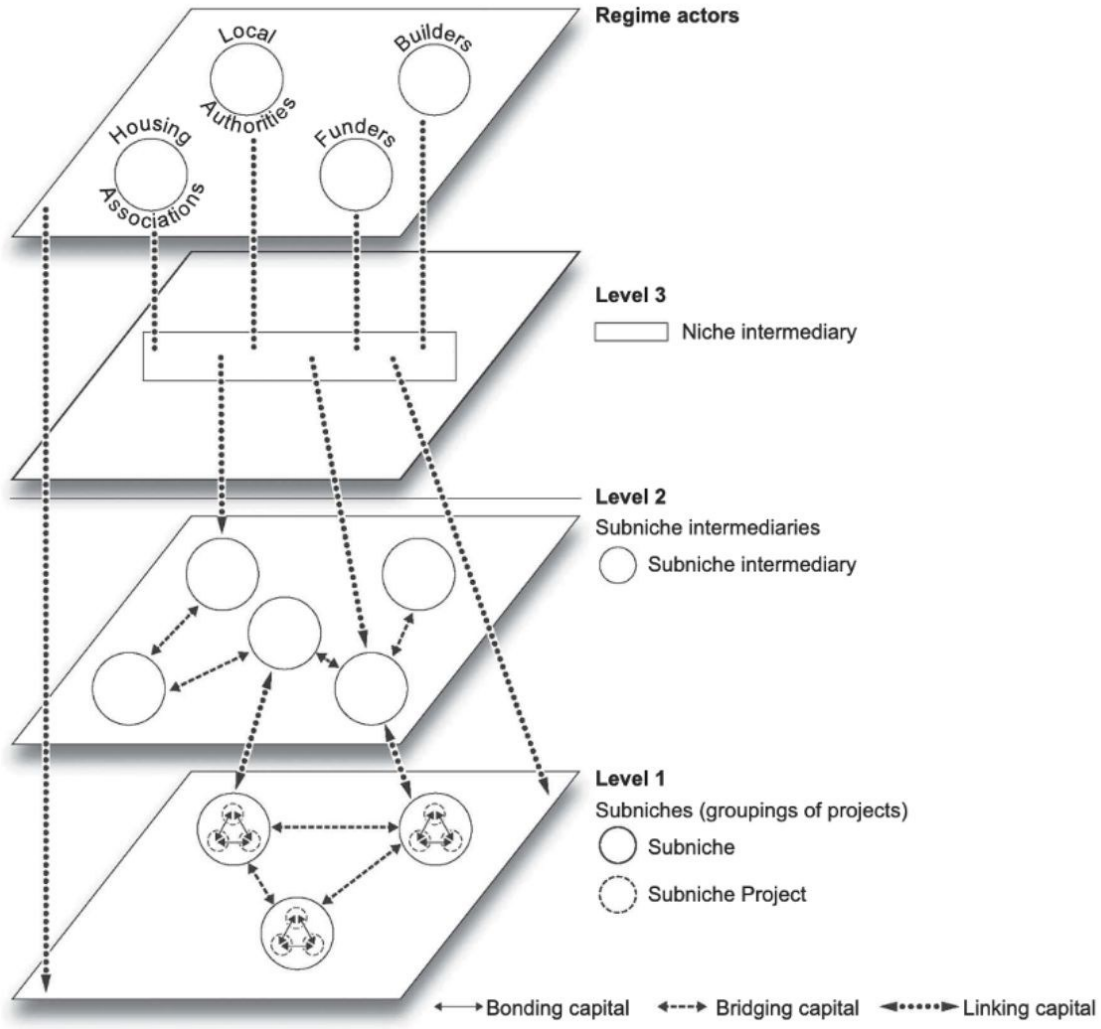
Since the interacting dynamic of the multiple levels, particularly between niche and regime, creates opportunities for change, this subchapter focuses on these dynamics. Often niche motivation is in sharp opposition to the established mainstream because innovations originate as targeted interventions designed to address specific flaws of the dominant regime (Smith, 2007).

This creates a contrast in the interaction of sustainable niche innovations within the housing regime. Smith highlights that niche practices must operate within both, the niche and the regime. Therefore, performance criteria and values for the projects must be based on common ground, involving the communication between niche and regime actors to understand and act within the full extent of the socio-technical situation. Constraints need to be analysed and relaxed together, while the regime might approach a situation closer to the niche (Smith, 2007).

Drawing on social capital theory, the analysis of social capital in niches helps to understand interaction between different actors in the scaling-up process. Three dimensions of social capital exist, that are crucial for the diffusion of community-led housing initiatives (Lang et al., 2020): First, bonding capital refers to the homogeneity of groups in terms of education, income levels or place. It creates a common knowledge base and trust within the community and is considered as strong in community-led housing. Second, bridging capital provides individuals with new information and resources and therefore connects people with different socio-economic and geographical background. Finally, linking capital is referred to access and mobilisation of critical resources such as funding or consultancy through the connection of niche individuals with powerful regime institutions. The latter is very important for niche innovation to diffuse by linking the niche to the regime and landscape level. Therefore, Lang et al. (2020) argue that intermediary organisations such as housing associations establish linking capital between local housing projects and regime actors that hold resources. Furthermore, the analysis of Lang et al. (2020) demonstrated that short-term government funding fosters the development of intermediary organisations. Figure 1 illustrates these niche-regime interactions, which are based on the social capital approach. Level 1 describes subniches, which are projects defined by certain similarities, such as spatial context, internal organisation or legal frameworks, to demonstrate the diversity of the projects. Level 2 and 3 display subniche and niche intermediaries, such as innovation platforms and broader cohousing organisations, respectively. Level 4 represents the regime actors such as local authorities, builders, housing associations and funders. These layers represent actors of the MLP. However, the operating range of these actors within the niche and the regime does not reflect a specific spatial scale.

Figure 2

'The interplay of forms of social capital in community-led housing' (Lang et al., 2020: 56)



Note. Adapted from 'The interplay of forms of social capital in community-led housing' (Lang et al., 2020: 56)

Furthermore, concerning sustainable housing provision, Czischke (2018) analyses the relationship specifically between housing residents (niche actors) and housing providers (regime actors) and their collaboration practices. The study found that the users, who initiated the project showed great involvement in its realisation and a collaboration with an established housing provider opened ways to key resources and professional expertise. It is also demonstrated that institutional actors with values towards sustainable housing projects are mor keen to collaborate with niche experiments than mainstream providers (Czischke, 2018). An example shows that the spreading of cohousing projects in Vienna is characterized by self-empowerment of citizens,

but simultaneously influenced by top-down measures due to an increasingly neoliberal city government (Butzlaff et al., 2025).

2.4.3 Scaling strategies

In addition to niche-regime interactions, the literature mentions further scaling strategies to overcome barriers. As mentioned above, especially the 'linking capital' is particulary important for overcoming unbalanced power relations and equipping niche actors with the means to influence the regime (Lang et al., 2020). Furthermore, Dijk et al. (2019) demonstrate ways to anticipate and overcome constraints on social innovation. This includes explicit learning strategies, where the ambitions of each stakeholder are understood and the learning process is reflected on and monitored. Therefore, a stakeholder analysis should be conducted and updated over time. The experiment must be flexible and adaptable to changing social and political conditions. It is very important to position citizens at the core of the experiment to understand the local context and the social debate surrounding it. Information sharing and building cooperations are considered crucial for the experiment's success. In the event of conflicting goals between stakeholder, 'multi-criteria decision-making techniques' can be employed to assist stakeholders in making the right choices (Dijk, M. et al., 2019: 21). To counteract the problems of institutional fragmentation, it is important to both, recognise that different actors are interdependent and to strengthen networks and collaboration transparently. Furthermore, to overcome low receptiveness of regime actors (e.g. if policymakers do not accept invitations) the outcomes of the experiment can be communicated via channels of democratic representation to raise awareness of the topic and bring it into the public sphere, thereby reaching political representatives (Dijk, M. et al., 2019).

Regime actors provide policies and guidelines for the implementation of innovation practices such as innovation strategies or regional development plans. These top-down measures can occur at a supranational, national or regional level. For example, the "Mit Sinn Fahrplan" offers tools for scaling strategies of social innovation in Austria (Poxleitner et al., 2024). It is a multistakeholder initiative of several social innovation hubs and organisations to propose a guideline for more social innovation and entrepreneurship in Austria. It offers 80 suggestions for framework conditions which support social innovation. This includes their visibility, recognition and relevance, the support of building networks, cross-sectoral cooperation, the potential of private capital and changing markets, science and education, the governance of social innovation and the expansion of existing public funding (ibid.). Furthermore, several regional

development programs (e.g. LEADER) are part of Austria's National Strategic Plan and are supported by the European Union, acting as guidelines for developing rural regions.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Research Question

Collaborative housing strategies present a promising way to counteract the sustainability challenges such as affordability and energy crisis, as well as climate change (Tummers, 2016). It was shown that collective housing forms benefits people's health and well-being by a mix of components such as community living, participation, legal and economic aspects (Reyes et al., 2022). However, the systematic review of Lang et al. (2020), including 195 papers about cohousing, identified a research gap in 'quantification and mapping efforts of the different cohousing models across Europe; processes and effects of policy and practice transfer across borders; and last but not least, examining the potential for the diffusion of the underlying principles of cohousing into mainstream housing provision systems' (Lang et al., 2020: 29). Furthermore, (Smith & Seyfang, 2013) argue that there is a necessity for research on the operation and diffusion of grassroot innovator networks, as well as the process of replication and upscaling of innovations.

The author's personal interest in collaborative housing and the participation in an international seminar about the co-creation of community spaces three years ago initiated the identification of the research problem. The collaboration with researchers at the Wegener Center for Climate and Global Change at the University of Graz (Institut für Wohnbauforschung, 2026; Jany, 2026), a lack of cohousing quantification Lang et al. (2020), as well as the authors own background highlighted the importance of conducting research in Upper Austria. To the author's knowledge, no quantitative mapping of cohousing projects in Upper Austria nor analysis of scaling processes existed. Furthermore, engaging with existing literature helped to narrow and sharpen the research question. According to the stated research problem and the state of literature, following research question was formulated:

How can cohousing projects in Upper Austria contribute to a sustainability transition in Austria's housing sector and what conditions are required to scale up their environmental, social and economic benefits within the region?

Following sub-questions guide the analysis:

- Which forms of collaborative housing are existent in the region and which socio-spatial and rural-urban differences occur?
- What are precise environmental and socio-economic impacts of cohousing projects in Upper Austria?
- What barriers and enabling factors influence the development and replication of cohousing models at the regional level?
- How can regional policy frameworks support the scaling and institutionalization of cohousing as a grassroots sustainability innovation?

The next section will introduce the research design, which was established to collect data, compatible to answer these research questions.

3.2 Mixed-Methods Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to empirically address the aforementioned research question. This includes qualitative methods, such as primary research data (interview and observational fieldwork) and secondary data (video analysis). Additionally, a quantitative mapping approach was chosen to analyse the cohousing landscape in Upper Austria. Further details on the methodologies are provided below.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

The aim of the qualitative research is to explore *how* collaborative housing projects generate sustainability benefits and *what* conditions are perceived as necessary for scaling up. Therefore, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. Interviewing is one of the most prominent qualitative research methods in geography, gaining access to information about experiences, events, opinions or places (Hay & Cope, 2021). Semi-structured interviews guide the interview by a set of questions with keeping the flexibility to adapt to information given by the participant (ibid.). The interview guide with predetermined questions is shown in Appendix B. For this empirical study, it was essential to ascertain the subjective views of founders, initiators, planners, and politicians regarding the challenges of jointly developing, designing, and utilizing cohousing projects.

To receive an overview of different stakeholder perspectives, four different experts were interviewed in the time of December 2025 and February 2026 (Table 2). Prior to the data collection,

the interviewees were provided with a GDPR-compliant informed consent form. The interviews' duration varies from 26 minutes to 52 minutes.

To gain insight into the perspectives of the inhabitants a secondary data analysis was conducted, which includes the analysis of videos provided by the Initiative GBW ("Initiative Gemeinsam Bauen und Wohnen"; initiative for joint building and living). The videos show conversations between cohousing residents as well as the project leader DI Ralf Aydt and were created as part of the "IniZuFuß 2025" project, which involved visiting seven initiatives in Upper Austria. The participants in the videos were chosen at random. The videos were checked for relevance to the research question, and four were chosen to be analysed and summarised in order to gain the residents' perspective (IP5). Every interview and video was transcribed with the GDPR compliant transcription platform "Good Tape". Then the empirical material was coded according to the system below. The method of qualitative content analysis is based on the work of (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022), proposing a mix of both, deductive coding for primary categories and secondly, inductive coding to develop and specify the coding system according to the content.

Table 2

Expert Interviews and Residents Perspective

Interview participant	Function	Date
IP1	Grassroot actor, member of Initiative GBW, member of an initiating project group	18. Feb 2026
IP2	Politician, "Die Grünen Oberösterreich", member of the Upper Austrian parliament, spokesperson for housing	02. Feb 2026
IP3	chairman of the consulting association "Wohnen mit Service" (housing with service)	16. Dec 2025
IP4	Cohousing consultant and planner	11. Dec 2025
IP5	Residents of four different projects	Summer 2025

The qualitative research analysis is based on the deductive coding system shown in Table A2 in Appendix A. This system is derived from the interview guide, the literature review, previous studies, and the research question. Primary deductive codes are based on the MLP, including niche, regime, landscape and cross-level interactions. Subcodes are derived from the interview

guide. Additionally, inductive subcodes emerged during the analysis of the material. A second round of coding was then conducted to implement these subcodes in every interview. However, the interviews were not assigned to a single MLP level, and the categories overlap in the answers. Overall, 429 segments were coded with the majority coded at the niche level (43%) (see Appendix A, Code Frequency). A summery table was then generated, summarizing every segment per code and interview, which guided the results.

In addition to the interviews, eight cohousing projects were visited, and participant observation data was conducted (see Appendix A, Table A3). Observational field notes were written, which aim to record an event with the five senses and emotional experiences in a chronological way (Hay & Cope, 2021). Seven projects were visited within a period of three days in August 2025 as part of "IniZuFuß 2025" (see above). Another project was visited in December 2025. Individuals were informed about the author's purpose for data collection. The aim of this fieldwork was to get to know the projects and its residents, as well as to gain insight into the socio-spatial context of cohousing. These findings are primarily discussed in section 4.6.

Overall, the qualitative research identifies existing conditions for scaling and the contribution of cohousing projects to sustainable regional development.

3.2.2 Quantitative research

The purpose of this quantitative approach is to map and describe the landscape of cohousing in Upper Austria to contextualize and supplement qualitative insights. Mapping of the projects with their characteristics and its systematic analysis aims to identify patterns of diversity, rural and urban differences, institutional embedding and developments of collaborative housing. In terms of the MLP the map serves to empirically record and structure the niche level.

The mapping table (see Table A1 in Appendix A) was adapted from the research group GO4CO which analysed cohousing projects in different regions of Austria including Vienna, Styria and Carinthia (Institut für Wohnbauforschung, 2026; Jany, 2026). Parameters of the table include planning structures (housing typology, construction measures, project initiation, developers), legal aspects (housing law form, administrative form, contractual relationship), financial aspects (housing subsidies), as well as project size and aspects of establishment and development (group formation, occupancy). The built infrastructure of the projects is mapped in the latter part of the table.

This study recognizes the diversity of individual projects and therefore, the difficulties to quantify data. However, based on the literature review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to guide the quantitative mapping approach (see Table 3). Projects were included in the analysis if residents shared an interest in living together sustainably and followed a participatory development and planning process (CO-HOPE, 2025). The built infrastructure contains extensive communal areas and shared spaces, as well as individual houses or flats (Bamford, 2001). The size of the building and the number of its inhabitants can vary significantly, ranging 'from a handful to 100 or more' (Bamford, 2001: 2). The organizational structures of the residents' group encourage self-management of the community and communal decision-making (Wankiewicz, 2015), while the legal forms can be individual or collective ownership, rental structures or a combination of these. Projects are excluded if they are considered to be a shared flat in a residential apartment building or social housing. Furthermore, residential buildings for people in need of external care ("Wohnheime") are not included in the analysis. However, participative projects for the elderly managed by a housing association also count. These criteria resulted in integrative projects, such as the "Integrative Hofgemeinschaft Loidhof", being excluded from the analysis due to their need for external care facilities. This means that the research project is less intersectional, a fact that should be reflected in future research.

Table 3

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the quantitative mapping approach

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
located in Upper Austria	Flatshare in a residential apartment building
shared interest in living together sustainably and with self-determination (CO-HOPE, 2025)	residential buildings for people in need of external care
Extensive common areas and shared spaces in addition to individual houses/flats (Bamford, 2001)	Social housing
Participative development and planning process	Communes (Tummers, 2016)
Organizational structure for the (self) managment of the community (Wankiewicz, 2015)	Housing cooperatives (Tummers, 2016)

The empirical body of this mapping approach is constituted by desktop research, phone calls as well as e-mail contact with stakeholders, a questionnaire sent by email to the projects (see

Appendix C) and explorative visits of eight projects (Field notes, Project 1-8, August & December 2025).

3.2.3 Literature Review

This study is positioned and contributes to the sustainability transition (ST) literature. In terms of conceptual and theoretical literature, it draws from a variety of transition literature, focusing on socio-technical system transitions and studies guided by the Multi-Level-Perspective (MLP) framework. The latter draws on the work of Geels, who was a key figure in developing the framework (Geels, 2002, 2005, 2011, 2019). Several studies have used the MLP framework to analyse sustainability transitions including still increasing trends (Wang et al., 2022).
Criticisms and further elaborations of the conceptual framework draw on literature relating to the geographical aspects of transition (Murphy, 2015; Raven et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2025) and the impact of power relations (Avelino, 2017; Ford & Newell, 2021; Smith et al., 2005).

In relation to studies at the housing sector, there are several scholars that have studied the capital city of Vienna and other urban regions of Austria (Czischke, 2018; Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Lawson, 2010; Vergara-Perucich, 2025). However, the analysis of rural areas is less prevalent in the literature (Wankiewicz, 2015). Throughout the years, academic literature has focused on cohousing, with several systematic reviews playing a crucial role in analysing the cohousing literature (Lang, Carriou, et al., 2020; Rafael Sosa-Ramírez et al., 2024; Tummers, 2016; Vestbro, 2000). It should be noted, however, that positive assessments of cohousing may be subject to bias, given that some contributing authors themselves are cohousing activists or residents (Lang, Carriou, et al., 2020). Accordingly, the authors call for more quantitative and critically oriented research to overcome these effects, particularly given the relatively limited scholarly history of cohousing.

A review of the academic literature was conducted through desktop research using the research tools Google Scholar and Scopus. Primary key words include “transition”, “multi-level-Perspective”, and “cohousing”, using variations and combination of these terms (see Table 4). Additionally, relevant literature was found through snowball searching.

Table 4

Key words of the Literature Research

Primary research term	**Variation**

Transition	Sustainability Transition
	Socio-technical system transition
	Housing transition
	Geography of Transition
Multi-level Perspective	MLP framework
	MLP criticism
Cohousing	Collaborative housing
	Communal housing
	Community living
	Cohousing in Europe
	Cohousing in Austria

3.3 Research Limitations

The short research duration of a master's thesis is limiting the in-depth investigation. However, expert interviews, project visits, desktop research and a video analysis in seven months led to a holistic view of the cohousing landscape in Upper Austria. To gain even greater insight into the context and the socio-technical housing system, the author recommends in-depth exploratory methods such as participant observation. Furthermore, the qualitative data results may be subject to bias due to subjectivity and positionality of the researcher.

The geographical scope and context of this study is tied to the region of Upper Austria. Empirical results of transition studies are context sensitive and place dependent (Coenen et al., 2012; Ribeiro et al., 2025). This place dependency must be considered for future research on the cohousing landscape in other regional contexts.

The quantitative approach is supposed to create a topology of cohousing projects in Upper Austria and to identify possible gaps such as financial support or spatial differences. Important to remark is that the number and diversity of projects used for this analysis may not be complete and evolves constantly. Due to time and resource limitations the map includes only projects which were accessible for the author in the according time of research.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the primary data analysis. First, the results of the quantitative mapping approach present the record of the structure and diversity of cohousing in Upper Austria. Results of specific projects are indicated and cited with a number in brackets and relate to Table A1 in Appendix A. Then, the qualitative results are presented. These are structured according to the MLP levels, starting with the niche, then the regime results are presented, followed by landscape codes and cross-level interactions. Finally, the socio-spatial context of cohousing in Upper Austria is described, based on interviews and fieldwork. The analysis is discussed in relation to the theoretical background of this study (section 2) and the empirical results.

4.1 Mapping of Cohousing projects in Upper Austria

The map includes 31 cohousing projects, while five projects (27-31) are discontinued and six are at the beginning stage (21-26) (see Appendix A, Table A1). The latter includes the formation of a group and/or the project is searching for a suitable place for the project. The following results were evaluated without including projects that had not yet been realized or had been discontinued.

The average project without outlier has 15,5 households. When the project Biesenfeld with its 656 apartments is included, the average number of households is 47,5. The average time of the planning process, meaning the time form initiation to moving in, is 2,9 years. To demonstrate the diversity of the project the projects are characterized by different housing rights, constructional measures, type of building and spatial properties. These categories are quantified in Figure 3. The majority of projects is located in rural areas, with many positioned within commuting distance to the city of Linz (see Figure 4). The large number of projects developed by the architect Fritz Matzinger results in individual ownership being the most prominent form of housing right. Most of these houses were built before the year 2000, offering limited experience of and legal possibility for collective ownership structures (IP1, personal communication, 2026). The results show that projects in collective ownership are increasing over time, while individual rents are present in some projects and for others no data of housing rights was found. Overall, 12 projects were established between 1975 and 2000, compared to eight in the subsequent 25 years with only two in the past five years. This suggests a declining rate of cohousing proliferation in Upper Austria, although a new wave of collective housing forms has generally

appeared across Europe in the early 2000s (Lang, Carriou, et al., 2020). Furthermore, almost half of the projects are “Les Paletuviers”, designed by the architect Fritz Matzinger. These usually comprise eight apartments organized around a courtyard that can be covered with a glass roof (Field notes, project 4, 2025). While the fundamental concept remained the same, the design has undergone variations over the decades, spanning from its initial implementation in 1975 to the present. Moreover, legal structures for collaborative housing in Upper Austria includes non-profit associations, home-owner’s associations (HOA), Limited Liability Companies (LLC) and non-profit housing cooperatives. A third of the cohousing projects are apartment buildings, while three projects (15%) are farm collectives and two projects (10%) consists of terraced houses. The majority of these were newly built, while 15% live in already existing buildings and 20% are a mix of both categories. Considering the environmental benefits of the revitalisation of existing buildings (Aigwi et al., 2023; Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 3) and the social and economic advantages of collective ownerships (Reyes et al., 2022; Interview 1 and 4) there is still improvement in the Upper Austrian cohousing landscape.

Figure 3

Quantitative Results - Characteristics of established Cohousing Projects in Upper Austria

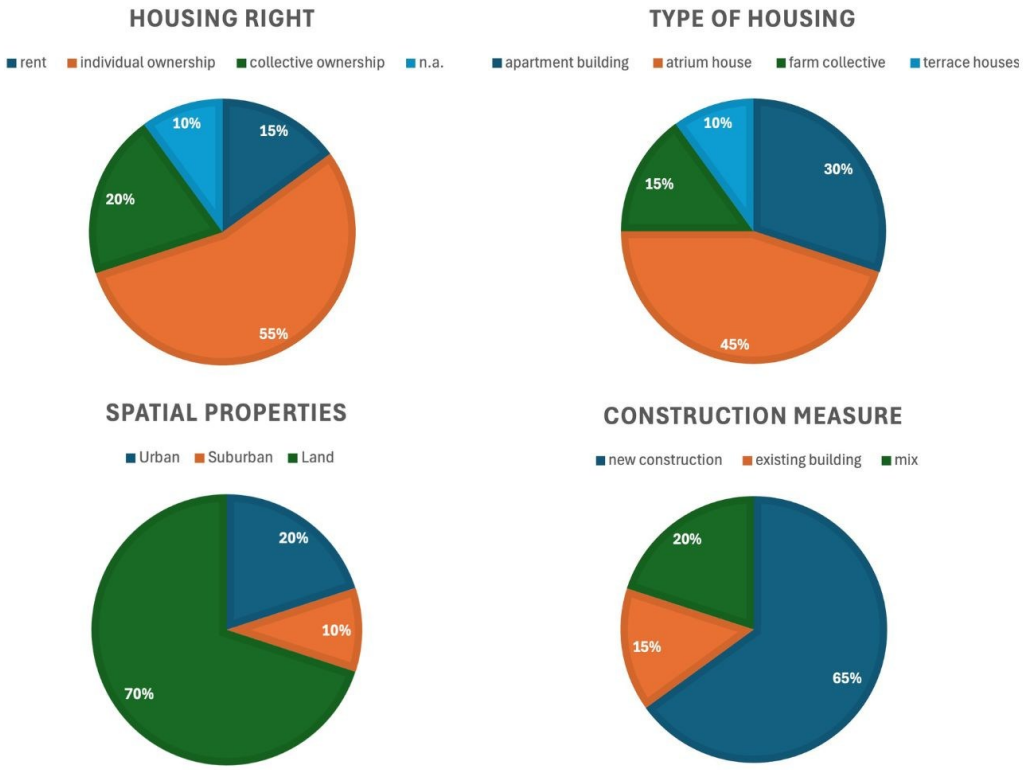
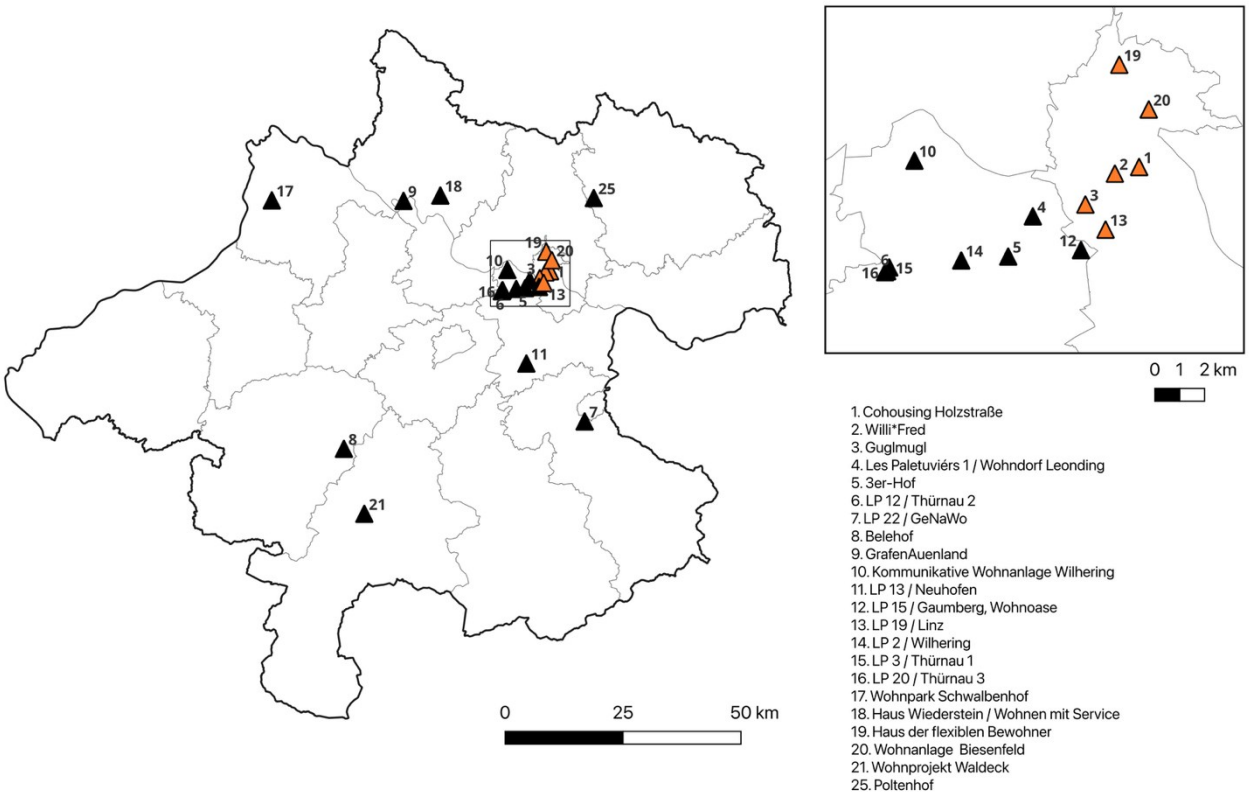


Figure 4

Quantitative Results - Geographic Map of CohousingPprojects in Upper Austria



Note. Author's own creation. Orange-coloured elements denote urban and suburban projects. The inset map depicts the city of Linz and its surrounding areas.

The results of the mapping approach include findings that extend beyond the niche level and encompasses the regime and landscape levels. While the geographic distribution of the projects clearly reveals a preference for rural Upper Austria, this stands in contrast to scholarly consensus. The literature positions cities as primary spaces for niche innovation (Marceau, 2008), with cohousing as a form of social innovation documented more frequently in urban and suburban areas (Mellner et al., 2021; Tummers, 2016). Furthermore, the development of projects specifically for elderly people (1 in Upper Austria so far) and the aim for intergenerational inhabitants indicate adaptation to changing demographics such as an increase of the older population (Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Nayak et al., 2023). By identifying public funding streams associated with the projects, the results reveal limited regime-support. Four projects received fundings by the federal state of Upper Austria (7, 8, 19, 20), one project (8) was subsidized to meet energy efficiency standards through the installation of a photovoltaic system, and individual apartment owners of another project were granted financial support through a housing and settlement fund

(4). Furthermore, the number of discontinued projects (28-32) demonstrate barriers and obstacles in the innovation process. For example, negotiations on the purchase agreement with the owner of the residential building proved to be the downfall of a project in the city of Linz (27). While one project discontinued due to participation fatigue (28), another building group dissolved after unsuccessful negotiations with the municipality regarding the redesignation of land for residential use (31). Projects 29 and 30 were developed as part of the EU project "Inn-Salzach EUREGIO" together with the "Regional development Upper Austria", including citizen participation and concept development. However, despite the willingness of the owners, actual implementation could not be initiated due to various challenges (e.g., suitable location, liabilities, financing, time schedule, etc.).

4.2 Niche

4.2.1 Environmental, economic and social benefits of cohousing

Scholarly consensus prevails environmental, social and economic advantages of cohousing (Carrere et al., 2020; Daly, 2017; Fromm, 2012; Reyes et al., 2022; Wankiewicz, 2015; Wonneberger, 2018). This was also confirmed by the interview data.

First, the environmental sustainability of cohousing projects was mentioned by three interviewees. Two of them highlighted the potential for reduced land use compared to single-family homes (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026). The size of individual flats can also be reduced by sharing community spaces, such as guest apartments instead of guest rooms in each flat. Often cohousing projects include people with ecological sustainable perspectives, which leads to a more sustainable lifestyle overall (IP4, personal communication, 2025). Furthermore, using natural materials, such as wood, in combination with sustainable practices such as rainwater usage, shared energy production or car-pooling, increases the environmental sustainability of such projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). The study of Fromm (2001) substantiates this by demonstrating the improvements of pro-environmental behaviours after moving into cohousing. Fromm (2001) documented increases in recycling and composting, in energy conservation, household food procurement (e.g. sharing food purchase) and sustainable driving moderation (e.g. car-pooling).

These sustainable practices are also cited as an economic advantage (Leutgöb, 2022). Sharing infrastructure makes expensive projects more affordable. When people within a housing project

rely on each other, the state is relieved of certain tasks and financial expenditures, such as childcare or care for the elderly, says one interview partner (IP1, personal communication, 2026). It is highlighted that collective ownership ensures long-term affordable housing by removing housing projects from the housing market and speculation (ibid.). In solidarity-based projects, such as WilliFred and 3erHof, rents are adjusted according to residents' socioeconomic situations, enabling even those with limited financial resources to afford living there (IP5, personal communication, 2025). One resident explains the habiTAT model with regard to economic aspects (ibid.). The model represents values that oppose individual ownership and the commodification of housing, translating these into practice by removing projects from the speculative housing markets (habiTAT, 2024).

Finally, social benefits of cohousing were mentioned in every interview. One interviewee describes the social benefits of communal living as strong neighbourhoods, mutual exchange, and social cohesion (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Common areas free from consumer pressure provide spaces for planning, celebrating, and meeting, thereby strengthening cohesion and promoting social contact. Additionally, dividing work into teams that oversee different aspects of a housing project can strengthen the community (IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP5, personal communication, 2025). The grassroot actor says that communal living prevents loneliness, especially in old age (IP1, personal communication, 2026). Additionally, studies found that communal housing increases people’s health and wellbeing (Carrere et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2022).

4.2.2 Grassroot actors

According to Lang et al. (2020), the (sub)niche level comprises grassroot actors, including individual projects and their residents, alongside organisations and initiatives that advocate for grassroots causes and foster connections among the actors. This is also found for the cohousing niche in Upper Austria. A common theme in the interviews is that private individuals, residents and owners are the main actors in promoting communal living (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP3, personal communication, 2025; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Two interviewees mention Fritz Matzinger, an architect who is considered a pioneer of cohousing in Upper Austria due to the quantity of his projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Associations such as the habiTAT and “Wohnen mit Service” (housing with service) are organisations that either include and connect projects with the same legal framework or work within one project (IP1, personal

communication, 2026; IP3, personal communication, 2025; IP5, personal communication, 2025). Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned the platform "Initiative Gemeinsam Bauen und Wohnen" (Initiative GBW, Initiative for Building and Housing,), which has worked for 15 years to promote cohousing. The initiative organizes events, such as panel discussions and online events, four times a year to bring interested parties and projects together. Information about housing projects in Austria is available on the initiative's website. A matching platform is also being planned (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Further connecting platforms are “Neues Wohnen in Gemeinschaft” (new housing in community) and “Gemeinsam Wohnen” (living together) (Gily, 2023). The latter was an initiative by the Green Party, but it was discontinued in December 2025 due to a lack of financial resources (IP2, personal communication, 2026).

4.2.3 Internal organization, conflicts and barriers

The diversity of cohousing projects and their internal organization brings various conflicts and barriers. Different legal forms of housing range from individual to collective ownership or rent. Informal organisation within projects also differs, including group dynamic processes and different property management (CO-HOPE, 2025). A previous study on cohousing in Lower Austria and Vienna, drawing on expert interviews, identified several key barriers, including high participant turnover, a particularly challenging initial phase, substantial time demands, and difficulties in securing a suitable project location (Gily, 2023). Moreover, the process of cultivating functional social dynamics within the group was found to be both time-consuming and taxing (ibid.). Similar findings were observed for Upper Austria which are presented below.

The differences between housing projects are reflected in their legal organizational forms, ranging from individual ownership to solidarity-based rents to communal ownership. These forms are a decisive factor for residents. Some projects hire external property management companies because they lack expertise in certain areas, while other projects are entirely self-managed, with an elected board, regular association or owners' meetings, and tasks divided among the group (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP5, personal communication, 2025). An external association can promote community life in and around the house (IP3, personal communication, 2025). One interviewee emphasizes the importance of mindful coexistence, give-and-take, and certain rules (e.g., noise times) in the housing project (IP1, personal communication, 2025). One resident mentions shared values such as community life and ecological sustainability, as well as joint celebrations that hold the group together (IP5, personal communication, 2025).

There are different opinions regarding the composition of the group among the interviewees. Individual ownership projects with little age diversity often leads to the original vision of the community disappearing as the project ages. Furthermore, residents mention the advantages and disadvantages of group size in relation to project success. In small groups, decisions can often be made more quickly. In larger groups, the advantage is that the group does not fall apart when individuals leave. Regardless of group size, relationships between members are important (IP4, personal communication, 2025; IP5, personal communication, 2025).

Regarding organizational barriers, the significant time and effort required, particularly at the project's outset, was mentioned several times (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025; IP5, personal communication, 2025). There is uncertainty as to whether the project can be sustained until the move-in date, and disagreements within the group can lead to difficulties. Another common difficulty is finding a suitable location and achieving a mix of ages in a project. For example, older people prefer quiet locations, while younger people need to be close to the city. From the residents' perspective, individual ownership, limited time, limited social networks outside the home, and a lack of bureaucratic know-how are organizational hurdles. It is a common sense among the interviews that conflicts will arise when different realities of people meet. Experience shows that the biggest conflicts arose due to financial situations (IP3, personal communication, 2025). One interviewee mentions the potential for conflict due to private financial resources; whereby economic interests could override quality (ibid.). One resident mentioned that it can be exhausting because one cannot act completely independently (IP5, personal communication, 2025). There are also building groups where commitment is lower, which causes difficulties in planning and implementation due to high turnover among participants. Conflicts may arise in existing projects if work is distributed unevenly. In a homeowners' association, all owners must agree to a decision. This makes implementing renovations difficult if individuals oppose them (IP5, personal communication, 2025). To solve conflicts, two interviewees recognize the use of conflict management tools and sociocracy for decision-making (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP5, personal communication, 2025).

4.2.4 Scaling strategies

As described in section 2.4.3 the literature provides suggestions to scale up social innovation. The findings of this study are presented and discussed below.

Every interview revealed scaling strategies at the niche level, which are summarized in Table 5

Qualitative Results - Scaling Strategies at the Niche Level. For the analysis the strategies are divided in project initiation and stabilization and, on the other hand, project replication. The latter include the role of media, networking events and conferences, educational work, funding, project visits and the impact beyond the house itself through a 'socio-spatial orientation' (IP5, personal communication, 2025) of projects. Project initiation and stabilization strategies include conflict management, stakeholder meetings, networking events across projects, sharing of experiences, consensus among project participants, private investments and certain independency from the state.

Table 5

Qualitative Results - Scaling Strategies at the Niche Level

Interview participant	**Scaling strategy**	
	Project initiation and stabilization	***Project replication***
IP1	Mechanisms for conflict resolution (e.g., mediation), age diversity	Participation of projects in the distribution of the topic through the media landscape (regional radio stations, podcasts, regional magazines)
IP2	Stakeholder meetings, networking between building groups, residents involved from the outset, inclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged people	Events, networking meetings of co-housuing groups, state-wide coordination office for community housing, conferences organized by the Initiative GBW, regular meetings of a project that are also open to the public
IP3	Recruiting association members locally, not being too dependent on government funding, perseverance on the part of private individuals, bringing private investors to the	n/a

	table, sharing experiences, consensus among project participants	
IP4	Age diversity, conflict management, feasibility studies, inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups (e.g., affordable housing), project visits, pool of experts to call upon	Events, networking meetings, support for regional groups, educational work, project visits, strengthening neighborhoods, information events for neighbors
IP5	stakeholder meetings/exploraty talks, project visits, time invested by individuals	Advertising through stickers, Housing Day (a celebration inviting various groups and organizations to WilliFred), Signal Group for networking beyond the house, impact beyond the house through 'social-spatial' orientation

Several interviewees identified the sharing of experiences through visiting other projects as a valuable tool for both initiating and stabilising projects. This aligns with Smith & Seyfang (2013), who emphasise that grassroots initiatives generate various forms of knowledge — both instrumental and technical in nature. For two interviewees the intergenerational aspects of a project are crucial for their success. Additionally, the analysis of Nayak et al. (2023) demonstrate that intergenerational housing creates a thriving and supportive environment for all ages. The inclusion of socio-economic disadvantaged households was mentioned in two interviews. To counteract, a case study in Vienna shows that the municipality is responsible for allocating a certain number of apartments of the project to people which are eligible for social housing (Czischke, 2018). Conflict management and consensus among project participants are crucial for stabilization (CO-HOPE, 2025). Moreover, networking meetings present another crucial scaling strategy. For example, gatherings in Lower Austria, where residents from multiple projects and other stakeholders convene to discuss their influence on the broader housing system. In collaboration with the Initiative GBW, the Lower Austrian group developed a policy paper that includes a framework for funding cohousing initiatives (Fluch et al., 2023). This have yet to emerge in Upper Austria.

4.3 Regime

4.3.1 Institutional barrier

Across the literature, a range of institutional barriers has been identified, including land ownership structures (Smith & Seyfang, 2013), insufficient awareness among developers and consumers, high costs associated with sustainable construction, limited stakeholder accountability, and low levels of trust between actors (Foong et al., 2017), as well as regime resistance and power struggles (Geels, 2019). Several institutional barriers were mentioned by the interviewees, primarily including political resistance and path dependencies.

First, a high complexity of project development and the lack of institutional support are mentioned. Unlike conventional residential construction, subsidies for building materials or project design cannot be obtained from the federal state for community projects. This is evident, for example, in the fact that building groups are not eligible for housing subsidies if they collectively own the property and aim to charge private rents within the group (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). In the early project phase, there is no institutional support and a high degree of dependence on private individuals. The politician mentions the difficulty of promoting new ideas in the Upper Austrian government and attributes this to her position in the opposition (IP2, personal communication, 2026).

A major barrier for civil society is that subsidies must be obtained by personally contacting the state council, rather than being anchored in law and thus made available to everyone (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Much is based on cronyism, meaning that more and more initiatives are organizing privately because they are hitting a brick wall with political institutions (e.g. the state council for housing). Housing developers would also like to see more support and guidelines from the state to help them implement sustainable construction (IP2, personal communication, 2026).

Furthermore, cohousing is a barrier for socio-economically disadvantaged actors without financial capital (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Although cohousing offers a richer and more convenient living experience, it does not necessarily translate into reduced costs for its residents (Garciano, 2011). However, a recent study argues that culture and not affordability is the main barrier for inclusion (Arbell, 2022). The social profile of cohousing residents is very distinct: white, highly educated and middle-high income (ibid.). This is supported by

Garcianos' article which claims that cohousing residents tend to display diversity across dimensions such as interests, age, religion, and household composition, but this diversity rarely extends to socioeconomic background, race, or education (Garciano, 2011).

One interviewee mentions barriers involved in finding properties for building groups (IP1, personal communication, 2026). The provision of real estate or land for community projects is low and should be promoted by local authorities. In addition, there are many owners who leave their properties vacant or do not grant building rights (ibid.). Two interviewees claim that groups were not able to proceed with their projects due to allocation policies, when municipalities refuse to rezone land for residential construction or grant building rights. Furthermore, individuals such as mayors can pose a major barrier (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025).

Politicians in Upper Austria are reluctant to provide financial support for building groups. The state councillor responsible for housing belongs to the conservative political party FPÖ and compared to housing spokespeople from other parties shows little interest in promoting communal housing (IP2, personal communication, 2026). After a brief discussion, the council rejected a motion by the Greens for a subsidy fund on the grounds that there is no need for it in Upper Austria. Conservative parties such as the FPÖ and the ÖVP actively impede progress on innovative housing projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026). One resident notes that, in general, politicians are not very aware of the issue (IP5, personal communication, 2025). Furthermore, political resistance is evident in the reuse of empty buildings; current housing policies focus on new buildings (Land Oberösterreich, 2026; IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026). There is a housing amendment that stipulates 2,000 new apartments must be built each year, as well as a redensification guideline to ensure less urban sprawl (ibid.). However, this amendment has resulted in the abolition of energy standards for sustainable construction. Therefore, it is up to developers to decide whether or not to build sustainably (IP2, personal communication, 2026). The politician also notes that there is little room for discussion on sustainability within the Upper Austrian government: 'There is a lack of political will at the top, to put it simply' (ibid.). Power dynamics between various actors are discussed in section 4.5.2.

Three interviewees mention the dominance of single-family homes in Upper Austrians landscape as institutional norm (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026, IP4, personal communication, 2025). The traditional culture of single-family

homes in Upper Austria is firmly anchored in the Austrian constitution. However, it does not have a long tradition and exploded in Europe in the second half of the 20th century. Owning a single-family home is still considered a status symbol today, and the dream of owning one's own home is very present in many people's minds. In the so-called “sprawling states” such as Upper Austria and Lower Austria, this form of living is strongly promoted by the government due to available land (Mundt et al., 2024; IP1, personal communication, 2026). The current consensus in Upper Austrian housing policy is primarily to promote social housing and, with 2,000 new apartments, primarily new construction (Land Oberösterreich, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026). According to the politician, there is a lack of structures to break through or reorient path dependencies (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Furthermore, as housing is a speculative market, various stakeholders (e.g. real estate agents) are interested in acquiring as much of it as possible. This has become the root cause of a lack of communal and affordable housing. Prices are determined by the market, so in federal states with high land and housing prices, such as Vorarlberg and Tyrol, there are very few cohousing projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026).

Building on these findings, Lang & Stoeger (2018) mention the limited receptiveness of the housing system to change as a partial explanation for the difficulties in establishing cohousing in Austria.

4.3.2 Institutional enablers

Institutional enablers mentioned in the interviews include political acceptance of cohousing projects, support from municipalities, funding schemes, subsidies and enabling legal regulations. Political support refers to representation by politicians in successful projects. One interviewee mentioned that various politicians visited the project after it won an award, however, did not provide any financial resources or practical support (IP3, personal communication, 2025). However, support from the municipality was key to the success the same project. According to the association's chairman of “Wohnen mit Service”, acceptance of such projects by state politicians or regional district administrations can have a significant impact (ibid.). Furthermore, municipalities that experience population decline are promoting such projects to generate immigration and revitalize the town centre (IP4, personal communication, 2025). The Green party supports the development of cohousing by fostering the discussion in the parliament and drafting motions for new funding schemes (IP2, personal communication, 2026). A residents memory reveals that occasionally, politicians take notice of the WilliFred, a project in the centre of Linz (IP5, personal communication, 2025).

Financial support towards cohousing projects needs to be separated in private and public funding. While interviewees argue for the need of more subsidies from the federal state, they name examples of other regions in Austria where integration of cohousing into the federal funding schemes brought success (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025; IP5, personal communication, 2025). For example, the government of Carinthia has established legal guidelines to promote the development of cohousing and building groups (Gruber & Treberspurg, n.d.), while Vienna's subsidy schemes for housing is integrating building groups (WWFSG 1989). However, one interviewee argues that a project should not rely too heavily on state or federal subsidies (IP3, personal communication, 2025). The Wiederstein House, for example, was primarily financed through private initiatives. However, the association's chairman also warns against compromising the quality of the project for the sake of economic interests (ibid.). The article of Van Bortel & Gruis (2019) discusses the collaboration of private, non-profit and government actors to increase affordable housing. The authors emphasize that neoliberal trends have generating a mix of state, market and community actors that develop, manage and finance affordable housing. However, they argue that the inclusion of niche actors benefits the supply of affordable houses, while political actors play a crucial role arranging it (ibid.).

In general, political legitimacy and regime support are crucial preconditions for the diffusion of innovations (Deviney et al., 2023; Geels, 2019). Considering the findings of the previous two sections, barriers remain substantial and institutional enablers remain occasional rather than being structurally embedded in Upper Austrian governance frameworks.

4.3.3 Actors network

The actor's involved in the Upper Austrian regime consist of planners, architects, cohousing consultants, politicians, housing provider and developer, the media, municipalities as well as the European Union, the city council of Linz and the parliament of Upper Austria. The politicians are the state council for housing and social affairs, as well as spokespersons for housing from opposition parties, mayors and community council members (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP3, personal communication, 2025; IP4, personal communication, 2025; IP5, personal communication, 2025). One interviewee mentions the different impacts of being either part of the government or the opposition (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Furthermore, housing providers can be non-profit or for-profit, with

some advocating for social innovation and sustainable buildings more than others (ibid.). For a further discussion of the interaction between these actors see section 4.5.1, and for an analysis of power relations between stakeholders, see section 4.5.2.

4.3.4 Replication strategies

The literature on replication strategies for transformative innovations highlight the support from important stakeholder (Geels, 2019), information about benefits and practices for consumers and users and the adaptability legal framework forced by convinced policymaker (Deviney et al., 2023). Furthermore, Smith & Seyfang (2013) argue that the diffusion of innovation requires its re-contextualisation in new environments.

While the empirical findings of this study mention stakeholder support and the spread of information for users (e.g. Open Housing Days for future residents), the interviews primarily highlight the establishment and professionalisation of networks as replication strategies at the regime levels and mention regions such as Vienna as best practice examples. The city of Vienna awards building plots to the best concept in a competition, which often results in community projects being chosen. Furthermore, Vienna's housing subsidy program also explicitly supports these housing projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Similarly, the city of Tübingen is an example of inner-city densification, buying up vacant land and granting building rights. Concepts are then submitted, and a competition is held to decide how the land can best be used for the city (IP1, personal communication, 2025). The politician highlights cross-regional networking and knowledge exchange (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Furthermore, providing targeted support during the critical early phase of the projects by establishing an organizational structure in which municipalities play a crucial role in opening spaces for new project ideas is essential (ibid.). A guideline published through an international research project on cohousing notes that many collaborative housing projects engage external process facilitators with experience in setting up such initiatives, who guide and support the group throughout the development process. This kind of support is especially crucial during the early stages of establishment (CO-HOPE, 2025).

Furthermore, the replication of social innovation is dependent on financial support in the form of subsidies, grants or awards (Westley & Antadze, 2010). The municipality of Kleinzell and its project were honoured with the New European Awards and the Upper Region Award 2022, leading to financial support of over 30.000€ (IP3, personal communication, 2025).

Furthermore, institutions such as rural development organisations or innovation labs helped to promote project initiation. For example, the Reality Lab in Vienna and the SPES academy in Upper Austria, which foster cohousing as social innovation, were mentioned in the interviews (IP3, personal communication, 2025; IP4, personal communication, 2025).

Overall, Upper Austria has no legal regulations enabling the replication of projects. Furthermore, a polit-to-program project achieving successful and context-sensitive replication supported by governance authorities may help the diffusion process (Dijk, M. et al., 2019). This was also suggested by the politician (IP2, personal communication, 2026). However, the quantity of "Les Paletuviers" (9 in total) demonstrate project replication initiated by the architect Fritz Matzinger. However, to identify successful re-contextualisation and replication, further case studies need to be conducted in the case of Upper Austria.

4.3.5 Policy instruments

The findings of the interviews concerning policy instruments are summarized in Table 6 and discussed below. In the text, the elements are highlighted in italics for better distinction.

Table 6

Qualitative Results - Policy Instruments for cohousing diffusion

Policy Instrument	Function	Reference
Professional guidance during the initiation phase	Support with regard to the additional expenditure for planning and process design, financial support from institutions since groups often cannot afford this process on their own	IP1, IP2
Land allocation policy	Designation of specific land areas for the use of building groups; granting of maximum usage rights to land by municipalities instead of parcelling and selling areas, land remains in public ownership	IP1, IP4
Political proposals	Political motions to anchor building groups in housing subsidy scheme	IP 2
Densification regulations	Regulations to prevent the deterioration of town centers and to reduce the amount of green space that is being developed.	IP2
Citizen participation processes	Promotion of citizen participation and development of innovative concepts for cohousing	IP 3

Feasibility studies	Reports to demonstrate the feasibility of projects in a certain location	IP4
Amandment Acts	Adaptation of the housing politics for current or future issues, examples: "Wohnungseigentumsnovelle" and "Wohnbaunovelle"	IP2, IP5
National or supranational programs	Programs that aim to promote knowledge exchange or provide financial support for local projects; examples: "Betreuungsarchitektur 2040", LEADER project, "EU Klimaziele"	IP 2, IP3, IP4

Professional guidance aims to support the planning and process design to overcome the barrier of additional expenditures, especially during the early stages of establishment (CO-HOPE, 2025). To the knowledge of the author, there is no official counselling centre for cohousing projects provided by the (federal) state in Austria. Concerning *land allocation policies*, the provision of affordable land by local governments enables the development of new housing but has significant implications for how property rights are distributed (Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Steinhoff, 2025). Furthermore, municipal councils in Austria hold considerable influence over spatial planning decisions, including determining the need for particular housing types and social housing within their jurisdictions (Wankiewicz, 2015). This locally concentrated decision-making authority may either support or hinder collaborative housing initiatives, depending largely on the disposition of local political actors. *Political proposals* may shape the political discourse towards sustainable housing, while *Amendment Acts* impose legally binding conditions. For example, recent renewal of regulations for individual ownership communities aims to make faster decisions for energy sufficiency projects, shifting from an unanimous consent to a simple majority vote (WEG-Novelle, 2022). Furthermore, a recent *re-densification regulation* aims to reduce the amount of land use and urban sprawl in Upper Austria (Oö. Nachverdichtungs-Verordnung, 2025). Furthermore, *feasibility studies* aim to demonstrate the feasibility of a certain project, usually on a local or regional scale (IP4, personal communication, 2025), while cross-regional programmes such as "LEADER" or the "Climate Goals 2040" act on a national or supra-national scale. LEADER (Liason entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale) is part of Austria's National Strategic Plan and supported by the European Union. It enables people to develop their region with projects which are funded by the program (BMLUK, 2026). Finally, *citizen participation processes* are instruments to involve citizen in planning and building processes. The importance of this policy instruments is argued by (Wankiewicz, 2015).

Overall, the qualitative results of this study support the findings of the study of Lang & Stoeger (2018). They found that Austria's existing housing policies are poorly adapted to support collaborative housing. Unlike Germany or Switzerland, where small cooperatives are a common and well-suited option for community-led housing projects, Austria's national and regional regulations have reinforced the dominance of large traditional cooperatives. This has led to a lack of diversity and innovation in the non-profit housing sector (ibid.).

4.3.6 Public Awareness

Niche projects may encounter scepticism or unfamiliar reactions from the broader public (Boyer, 2013). Nevertheless, public acceptance remains a critical prerequisite for the scaling of social innovation (Avelino, 2017). The empirical findings of this study suggest a comparatively low level of public awareness in Upper Austria. One interviewee mentioned that the topic is becoming more prominent in the public consciousness (IP1, personal communication, 2026). However, awareness of innovative communal housing projects is still very low in the Upper Austrian political circles (IP2, personal communication, 2026). The planner explained that cohousing is not well-known enough to be legally established yet (IP4, personal communication, 2025). However, academic research and publications on communal living are raising awareness of the topic (ibid.). Furthermore, an exhibition is showcasing living and housing options for the elderly and raising awareness in communities in Upper Austria, and the number of articles about cohousing in the media is slightly increasing (IP1, personal communication, 2026).

4.3.7 Neighbourhood Development and the Role of Municipalities

Cohousing models can encourage people to socialize, care and interact within their neighbourhood to build a stronger community (Fromm, 2012). The interviews explain that collaborative housing projects can promote the development of a vibrant town center. They strengthen neighborhoods and encourage intergenerational exchange within the municipality. For example, ongoing events in housing projects bring local residents together. Cafés and co-working spaces in these projects can revitalize the area. By participating in urban and neighborhood development, these projects contribute to community development, as seen with the Cohousing Holzstraße project in Linz (IP5, personal communication, 2025).

The study of Droste (2015) discusses opportunities for municipalities in Germany and argues that cohousing groups should be included in the stock of municipal housing companies and

institutional investors to benefit neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the Department of Regional Development in Vorarlberg (Ullrich-Schneider & Stampfl, 2022) and the Initaitive GBW have developed comprehensive support guides for municipalities (Leutgöb & Weiser, 2025). The first guideline suggests a range of active support measures for cohousing projects in Vorarlberg, including the allocation of land under building rights, the promotion of building cooperatives, the exchange of knowledge and information with other initiatives, the positioning of municipalities as project initiators, and the fostering of broader civic engagement. Additionally, the proposal of Leutgöb and Weise (2025) highlights the economic advantages of offering non-profit and needs-based housing for the communal housing market. Furthermore, cohousing projects promote the sustainable development of cities through social and ecological innovation as well as the revitalization of municipalities (ibid.). A region-specific guideline to contextualize cohousing in the Upper Austrian housing sector is yet to be developed.

4.4 Landscape

4.4.1 Crisis-driven attention and value shifts

Spatial dynamics and developments of the real estate market are crucial for alternative housing projects to thrive (Förster et al., 2020). European cities, famous for the development of alternative housing, such as Tübingen, Freiburg and metropoles like Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Vienna have experienced housing shortage. Population growth and the increase of jobs, as well as a rising number of single households are leading to a significant excess of demand, resulting in rising home prices and rental rates (ibid.). The results of the interview analysis reveal crisis-driven attention with a focus on the affordability and the ecological crisis, and a shift in values towards greater sustainability thinking.

The politician mentions that not everyone will be able to afford a single-family home and that we cannot continue our building culture as it is today (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Two interviewees cite rising housing and energy costs as reasons to rethink the status quo (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026). In recent years, high construction and rental costs, as well as inflation and high interest rates, have led people to seek affordable housing (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; Matějková & Tichá, 2025). Additionally, the climate crisis and high land consumption are causing people to switch to sustainable construction methods and raising awareness of sustainable building practices (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP2, personal communication, 2026; Schirpke et al., 2023). The planner mentions that people with an awareness of sustainability

coming together is leading to sustainability becoming a focus in housing projects. Planners are also rethinking their approach so they can plan projects that are more reflective of resource consumption (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). According to one interviewee, communal living has become "modern," and social cohesion is becoming increasingly important to people (IP4, personal communication, 2025). Two interviewees mention the isolation of older people, in particular (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP3, personal communication, 2025). Many older people live alone in large apartments and only use half of the space. The politician mentions the increasing number of people living alone per household and that neoliberal developments in urban planning are leading to fewer spaces where people can gather without feeling pressured to consume (IP2, personal communication, 2026).

One interviewee mentions that single-family homes do not have a long tradition in Austria (IP1, personal communication, 2026). In Upper Austria, communities in villages existed alongside farms. The construction of single-family homes expanded these areas, placing a financial burden on the communities responsible for developing infrastructure (water, sewage, garbage collection, etc.) (ibid.). Furthermore, one interview participant emphasizes that, due to the financial situation, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many people to realize their dream of owning a single-family home (IP2, personal communication, 2026). However, it is important to note that different realities and ideas lead to fragmented desires among people (IP1, personal communication, 2026).

4.4.2 Urban-rural differences

Most of the interview partners mention urban and rural differences of the housing sector as well as the dynamics of cohousing. One interview participant addresses the anonymity of the city (IP1, personal communication, 2026). Some people move into nonprofit housing in the city to maintain anonymity while minimizing the amount of work involved. Nonprofit housing is mainly found in cities because it would not be profitable in rural areas. However, there is often a sense of community within the rural village. (ibid.). The politician mentions that there is probably a need for communal housing projects in rural areas as well, just not as much as in cities or metropolitan areas. The interviewee believes that the need for general community spaces is universal, regardless of the location. However, it may be necessary to adapt building designs to geographical locations (e.g., smaller projects in smaller communities) (IP2, personal

communication, 2026). According to one resident in Linz, being connected to the city is key for the project's success (IP5, personal communication, 2025).

Furthermore, the planner highlights the differences between the capital city Vienna and Upper Austria (IP4, personal communication, 2025). Vienna has a strong network of political support for cohousing projects. For instance, land in development areas is explicitly designated for community housing construction. In contrast, Upper Austria has a smaller network and limited funding. The city of Vienna pays more attention to innovative cohousing because there is a greater need for densification. Additionally, many developers in the capital city focus on co-housing and spaces like the Reality Lab provide process support and assistance with projects. This is lacking in Upper Austria (ibid.). However, development of cohousing in Upper Austria demonstrates a focus in the surroundings of Linz. In rural areas, housing projects often play a significant role in fostering neighbourhood cohesion, such as through local agriculture and self-sufficiency (ibid.).

These findings suggest a dependency on place for the development of cohousing projects. While metropolitan areas are ahead of the curve, rural areas face challenges in promoting innovative housing models.

4.4.3 Demographic changes

The review of Tummers (2016) found that the cohousing literature in Europe addresses demographic changes such as an aging population, the emancipation of women and moving away from traditional family structures. Two interviewees mentioned population fluctuation (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Some migrate to the city for a job, while others move from the city to a rural community for a calmer environment. The municipality and the federal state often resolve the settlement issue by expanding villages with single-family homes instead of utilizing vacant properties or building nonprofit apartment buildings (ibid.). In Upper Austria, the population is very scattered, with single-family homes being the most common type of housing. As a result of urban sprawl, town centres are becoming emptier, and life is increasingly focused on the outer suburbs (IP2, personal communication, 2026; Tummers, 2016). Furthermore, one interview participant views the aging population as the driving force behind the development of alternative housing projects (IP3, personal communication, 2025).

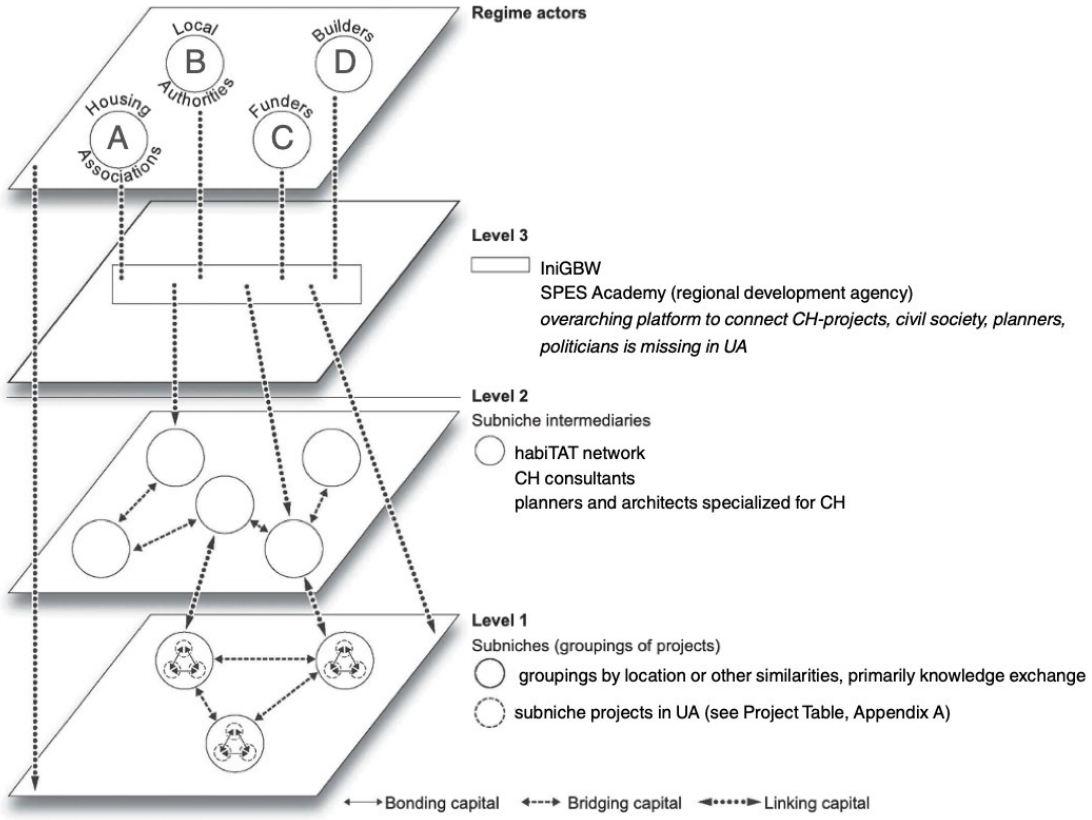
4.5 Cross-level interaction

4.5.1 Niche-Regime interaction

Based on the findings of the interviews and the mapping approach, Figure 5 demonstrates the Upper Austrian actors' network, adapted from Lang et al. (2020). The regime is built up by housing associations, local authorities, funders and builders which interact with every (sub)niche level. An overarching organisation is the Initiative GBW and SPES Academy to connect stakeholders. The subniche level in Upper Austria comprises individual planners, architects and consultants, the habiTAT network and residents within their cohousing projects.

Figure 5

Qualitative Results - Niche-Regime Interaction in Upper Austria



Note. Author's own creation, adapted from Lang et al. (2020: 56); Abbreviations: CH = Cohousing, UA = Upper Austria; A) GBV OÖ, NEUE HEIMAT OÖ, OÖ Wohnbau and several for-profit building providers, B) Municipalities, Mayors, State Councilor for Housing (FPÖ), Spokespersons for housing (opposition parties), C) Municipalities and government of UA, private investors, European Union, D) housing provider and developer

Interaction and cooperation between regime and niche actors, such as planners and residents, can lead to more ecological and sustainable construction methods (IP4, personal

communication, 2025). However, according to the interviewee, planners have little political influence. When submitting a project, planners must follow rules set by the federal state. However, feasibility studies can be conducted to determine the viability of a communal housing project in a given location. There is also interaction between academia and niche actors. The Initiative GBW, for instance, regularly collaborates with universities to conduct research and publish findings on the topic (ibid.). Furthermore, the politician emphasizes cooperation between municipalities, housing developers, and NGOs. Projects should be developed jointly and, above all, supported and accompanied by experts and politicians, especially in the critical initial phase (IP2, personal communication, 2026). An example shows that communication primarily took place between the client (i.e., the municipality) and the housing developer during the construction phase. The project's housing association became involved when plans for important infrastructure were decided upon that would enable age-appropriate living (IP3, personal communication, 2025). Social organizations such as Volkshilfe and Diakonie play a major role here, as they are aware of the populations' needs (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Such collaboration, for example, is shown in the example of the project Rosa Zukunft ("pink future") in Salzburg, where the Diakoniewerk, a non-profit organisation for social care led the conceptualisation of the project (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). The politician also reports on conferences where experts from all areas of the construction industry come together to network. At the end of the interview, she expresses her wish for people to actively approach politicians, inform them of results, or invite them to events build networks and gain professional input (IP2, personal communication, 2026). In the context of an initiative by the Federal State Secretary of Social Affairs, which covers 200 innovative projects, one interview participants mentions that politicians did provide very little feedback on the projects, demonstrated through a lack of information of the initiatives' progress (IP3, personal communication, 2025). A resident of the Holzstraße cohousing project explains that the project is attempting to integrate itself into the city by participating in neighborhood development and urban revitalization initiatives, such as traffic calming measures and greening projects (IP5, personal communication, 2025). The residents also invite local politicians to visit the building or enjoy participating in city events, hoping to contribute to urban development (ibid.).

None of the interview participants mentions any collaboration between housing provider (builder) and niche stakeholder. However, the study of (Czischke, 2018) emphasizes that partnerships between project initiators (e.g. future residents) and established housing providers led to high user involvement and access to key resources and professional expertise. In that case,

the planning and conceptualisation process and daily management activities where shared between residents, architects and the housing provider, which is traditionally the role of builders. In addition, the provider acts as intermediary and allocation manager, to channel funding and owns the land and the building (ibid.).

On a more general note, the study of Smith (2007) discusses the translation of sustainability between niche and socio-technical regime, taking the case of ecohousing into account. The author emphasizes fewer radical niches adapt easier into systems of the regime, however, their sustainability will change correspondingly to the adaptation. More radical cohousing actors therefore face the challenge of risking collaboration with inherent regime actors. However, adaptation to prevailing regime norms at the cost of compromising the project's sustainability values does not constitute to a transformative change (Smith, 2007).

4.5.2 Power relations

Some of the barriers that hold sustainability initiatives back to develop their full potential are deeper issues of economic and political power (Smith & Seyfang, 2013). According to Smith and Seyfang (2013) land ownership structures, for instance, can exclude grassroot innovators and hinder the establishment of community projects. Therefore, the urge to explicitly include regime resistance and power relations into the analysis of change is highlighted in the literature (Avelino, 2017; Ford & Newell, 2021; Geels, 2019).

The findings of the interview reveal resistance of incumbent regime actors, primarily politicians, and power relations between stakeholders. For example, it was mentioned that some community councils impede the establishment of cohousing projects by not including them into their development strategies or by rejecting necessary land dedication for innovative projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of interest in cohousing of powerful politicians fosters power dynamics, as one interviewee said: 'If a mayor doesn't want to and simply says, "I'm not interested," then you're banging your head against a wall' (IP1, personal communication, 2026; IP4, personal communication, 2025). As the interviewed politician said, there is a general belief in Upper Austria that everyone is dependent on the State Council of Housing to access funding (IP2, personal communication, 2026). This dependency indicates a difference in power between the politician and the population. As a result, more initiatives are looking for private investors to fund their projects, which

are then at risk of sacrificing quality for economic profit (IP2, personal communication, 2026; IP3, personal communication, 2025).

Overcoming impediments through power relations involves empowering disadvantaged groups, which gives them the capacity to mobilize resources and institutions (Avelino, 2017). Training sessions and workshops for policymakers to reflect on their own power dynamics are used to challenge power relations (ibid.). Wankiewicz (2015) highly recommends the shift of top-down planning to participatory planning approaches in rural Austria to overcome power relations. In general, there must be a shift away from the dominant practices of the socio-technical regime, and targets and regulatory guidelines need to be established beyond the boundaries of institutional norms to reduce power imbalance (Smith & Seyfang, 2013).

4.5.3 Scaling and Replication

In addition to the scaling and replication strategies described at the niche and regime levels, this chapter emphasizes that these strategies often depend on cross-level interaction. For example, events organized by sub-niche and regime actors play a recurring role in the interviews. In Upper Austria, for instance, the Holzbau Dialogue brings together a diverse group of individuals from the construction industry, social organizations, and political parties to network (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Additionally, there should be a stronger lobby bringing the topic of cohousing to the political agenda. In order to increase the willingness of those who are not yet familiar with the topic, politicians need to be informed and presented with results (ibid.). Furthermore, feasibility studies are a scaling strategy that demonstrate whether and how a communal housing project could be realized in a specific location. For example, one interview mentions a plot of land in the centre of St. Johann that was to be developed by converting the existing buildings, involving niche and regime actors (IP4, personal communication, 2025).

4.5.4 Social Innovation in Upper Austria

The findings of Vergara-Perucich (2025) emphasize a slow process of integrating innovative approaches, such as collaborative models of living in Vienna. A limited innovation landscape can also be found in Upper Austria, as emphasized by the empirical findings of this study (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Necessary structures to promote innovation are lacking (ibid). According to the planner, every project must start from scratch because there are no existing structures to build on (IP4, personal communication, 2025). As for cohousing projects, this may be due to the public's limited awareness and knowledge about the topic (ibid.). The member of

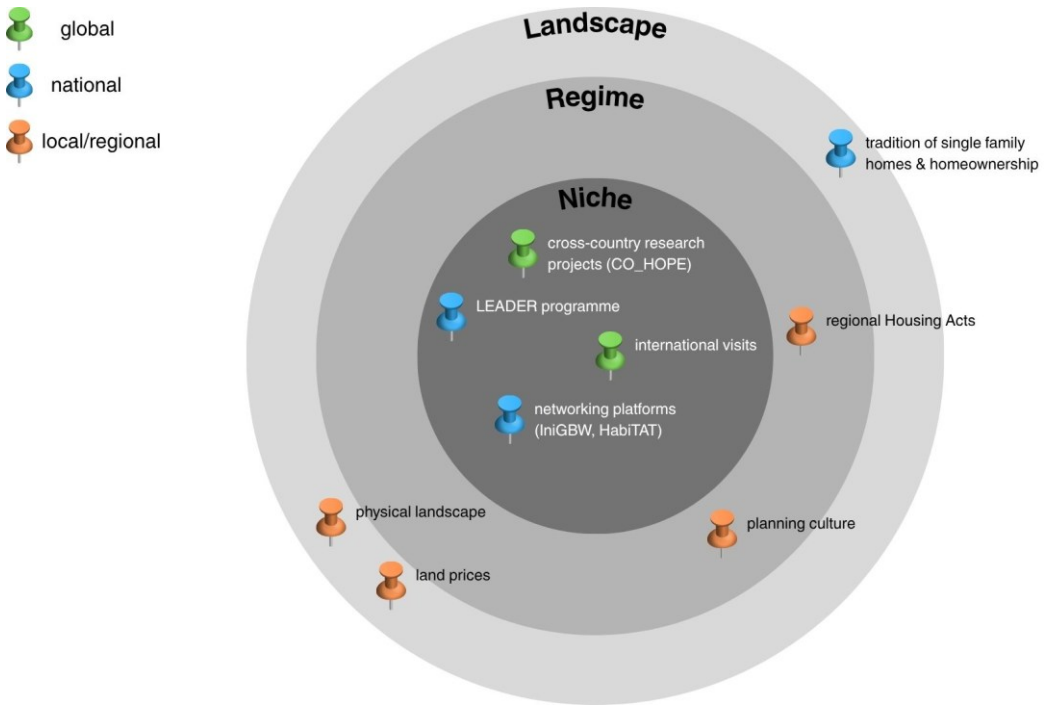
a housing association cites volunteer work as a driving force behind innovative projects, viewing volunteering as a fundamental advantage because volunteers tend to be more dedicated to the project. However, a lack of volunteers can hinder project development (IP3, personal communication, 2025). In terms of political innovation enablers, the politician mentions the exchange of knowledge between politicians and experts to gain insights and expert opinions on the topic (IP2, personal communication, 2026). Furthermore, cross-level enablers are organisations such as the SPES Academy, an organization dedicated to rural and urban development. These organizations are important intermediaries that enable innovation. One interview participant mentions architects and planners, who actively promote housing innovation (IP4, personal communication, 2025). In Upper Austria, the architect Fritz Matzinger is a notable figure who has focused on cohousing projects (ibid.).

4.6 The Socio-spatial Context of Cohousing

Based on the understanding of the geography of transitions (see 2.3.2) it is argued that regime and niche factors in the housing transition of Upper Austria are a socio-spatial construct embedded in a multi-scalar manner and perpetuated through the distribution of power between actors. The analysis of this research demonstrates that niches and regimes operate at different scales. For example, regimes are not only “national”, while they are constituted from local, regional and global elements. Research results are visualised in Figure 6. First, empirical findings for a multi-scalarity of the cohousing context are presented, based on interviews and project visits. Then the spatial effects of cohousing are discussed.

Figure 6

Qualitative Results - Multiscalarity in the MLP framework



Note. Author's own creation. Push Pins resemble the geographical scale. Circles demonstrate the levels of the framework and resemble interconnectedness of the levels.

First, the absence of a national Housing and Regional Planning Act results in nine distinct housing strategies in Austria, overseen by its federal states. One interview participant mentioned significant differences in land prices, which makes it difficult for building groups to start their projects (IP1, personal communication, 2026). This is evident in the small number of cohousing projects in Tyrol, Salzburg and Vorarlberg, which is due to high land prices (ibid.). Furthermore, the physical composition of the landscape influences the housing and building sector. Lower and Upper Austria have the potential for extensive development due to their large areas without mountains or lakes (IP1, personal communication, 2026). Additionally, rural versus urban differences in the Austrian cohousing landscape suggest a place-based dependency for the development of such projects (see section 4.4.2). While metropolitan areas such as Vienna are ahead of the curve, rural areas face challenges in promoting innovative housing models. Therefore, Wankiewicz (2015) argues for a scalar shift in planning culture from the local to the regional level to ensure adequate infrastructure, meeting housing needs and maintaining good locational qualities in rural Austria.

The analysed niche level in this case study is constituted and influenced by factors at the regional, national and supranational scale. For instance, the promotion of niche innovation to support regional development is overseen by programs from the national state and the European Union (e.g. LEADER). Furthermore, niche cohousing initiatives and platforms, such as the Initiative GBW and HabiTAT, span the federal states of Austria with aims to grow. Another example demonstrates cross-border exchange at the niche level. For instance, the project in Kleinzell in the northern region of Upper Austria hosted international delegations from Ireland, Turkey and Germany. These delegations visited the project to connect and broaden the cohousing network in Europe (IP3, personal communication, 2025). Additionally, academic projects such as CO-HOPE (Co-housing in a Pandemic Era) aim to expand the knowledge base and aim to co-create collaborative living spaces across Europe, including research institutes in Spain, France, Austria and Sweden (CO-HOPE, 2025).

It is criticized that advantages of cohousing remain within the group of the project and its scope is limited to the domestic sphere and the local neighbourhood, respectively (Sargisson, 2012). To the authors knowledge, four projects actively contribute to engage both, locally and regionally, for example through offering workshop or seminar spaces for the public (Field notes, Project 2, August 2025), practicing community-supported agriculture (Field notes, Project 5, August 2025), and renting areas of their house to institutions or firms relevant for the public (e.g. physiotherapists, office of a midwife, pharmacy) (Field notes; Project 1, August 2025; Project 8, December 2025). The rest of the projects seem to have limited to no effects on the neighbourhood and benefits of community building and social cohesion remain among the members. To determine wider effects on the region, further studies need to be conducted. Ribiero et al. (2025) advocate for an integration of more spatially inclusive approaches including geographical perspectives by promoting greater interdisciplinary research. The acknowledgement of an increasing engagement of geographers in transition studies is hightening the sensitivity of transition studies to scales and spatialities (Binz et al., 2020). Finally, Arbell (2022) argues that awareness for cohousing is not created locally, but between like-minded, mostly White, highly educated and middle-high income people. Participant observation and the landscape in Upper Austria is undermining this argument, although further research on group formation and composition is needed.

5. Conclusion

This study analysed the context and dynamics of cohousing in the region of Upper Austria. The investigation aimed to identify the regional cohousing landscape and measures to replicate and scale up cohousing as social niche innovation in the current socio-technical housing system. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the growing literature body of sustainability transitions and social innovation research. The necessity of empirically quantifying and mapping social innovation to understand transition processes, especially for collaborative housing research, was emphasized by Lang et al., (2020). Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to context-specific cohousing research to gain an overview of the Austrian landscape of this housing typology, which is currently being conducted by researchers lead by the Wegener Center for Climate and Global Change at the University of Graz (Institut für Wohnbauforschung, 2026; Jany, 2026).

The theoretical-conceptual MLP framework, increasingly applied in transition studies (Wang et al., 2022), was used as foundation for this research. The MLP acts as a heuristic device that allows integrative and multi-dimensional analysis (Geels, 2019). The framework offered to analyse cohousing as niche innovation within the current socio-technical housing regime, influenced by landscape pressures. However, critics highlight a lack of geographical aspects (Ribeiro et al., 2025) and power relations within the analysis of the framework (Avelino, 2017). Therefore, qualitative research was used to examine power imbalances in Upper Austria and their effects on cohousing replication, while the empirical findings were further analysed to identify socio-spatial dimensions such as place dependency and regional differences.

The examination of the results was guided by a mixed-methods research approach. The qualitative research methods include four semi-structured expert interviews, a video analysis to conduct the resident's perspective and site visits of eight projects, which all aimed to explore *how* cohousing projects generate sustainability benefits and *what* conditions are perceived as necessary for scaling up. Additionally, a quantitative mapping approach was conducted to describe the typology of cohousing in Upper Austria to contextualize and supplement qualitative insights.

Overall, political measures must change to support cohousing projects at the institutional level. Furthermore, the public discussion and inherent values of individual ownership and single-family homeownership must fade. These changes are primarily the result of the ongoing housing

and affordability crisis. Despite a limited awareness and knowledge of the general public about cohousing, the niche is slowly expanding in Upper Austria.

First, the mapping approach examined 31 cohousing projects, including five discontinued and six in early formation stages. The majority is located in rural areas (70%), are newly constructed (65%), and use individual ownership as housing right (55%), with a notable dominance of projects initiated by the architect Fritz Matzinger (nine in total). Discontinued projects highlight barriers such as failed stakeholder negotiations, participation fatigue, and lacking land redesignation. Public funding analysis reveals limited regime-support.

Secondly, qualitative research provided insights across niche, regime and landscape levels. Landscape pressures such as housing shortages, rising energy and rental costs, and demographic shifts are driving the housing regime towards alternative structures. The traditional preference for single-family homes in Upper Austria is increasingly difficult to realise financially, while urban-rural disparities point to a strong place dependency in cohousing development. While metropolitan areas such as Vienna are ahead of the curve, rural areas face challenges in promoting innovative housing models.

At the niche level, identified benefits include reduced land use, ecological gains, affordability through shared infrastructure, collective ownership, and solidarity rents. However, cohousing does not necessarily translate into short-term reduced costs for its residents, therefore excluding socio-economically disadvantaged actors. Social advantages encompass reduced isolation and community cohesion. Key actors include residents and connecting platforms such as Initiative GBW and HabiTAT, with scaling strategies ranging from conflict resolution and networking to educational work and age diversity.

The regime analysis exposed institutional barriers including political resistance, path dependencies, ineligibility of building groups for housing subsidies, lack of municipal support, and conservative opposition to alternative housing models. Nevertheless, some projects received municipal and private support, reinforcing place dependency. Replication strategies at this level centre on professionalised networks, with referring to Vienna cited as best practice. Compared to other Austrian federal states, Upper Austria lacks dedicated legal frameworks, though several policy instruments are discussed, including land allocation policy, densification regulations, feasibility studies, as well as regional and national funding programmes.

Cross-level interactions show strong engagement between niche actors and planners or architects, but limited contact with politicians, whose resistance and power dynamics, such as excluding cohousing from municipal development strategies or rejecting land dedications, remain a significant obstacle.

The analysis of the socio-spatial context of cohousing demonstrates a multi-scalar manner in the MLP framework. Regime aspects do not necessarily translate into national scale, and simultaneously, national programmes act at the niche level. For example, Housing Acts in Austria are overseen by federal states and the planning culture acts primarily locally. On the other hand, niche platforms such as Initiative GBW and HabiTAT span across Austria with aims to grow. Additionally, rural versus urban differences in the Austrian cohousing landscape suggest a place-based dependency for the development of such projects.

Despite the seven-month timeline and regional focus on Upper Austria, the combination of expert interviews, site visits, desktop research and video analysis enabled a holistic view of the cohousing landscape. Qualitative results remain subject to researcher bias and methods such as participant observation are recommended for future work. The quantitative mapping provides a useful topology of existing projects, though its completeness is constrained by time and resource limitations. Findings should be interpreted as context-specific, as transition research is inherently place-dependent and may not transfer directly to other regional settings.

Future research should identify inherent place dependency by comparing cohousing development at the regional scale and putting them into context. Moreover, to overcome the criticism of lacking geographical perspectives in MLP studies, Ribiero et al. (2025) advocate for an integration of more spatially inclusive approaches including interdisciplinary research. With the increase of geographers engaging in transition studies, the research field is developing a heightened sensitivity to scales and spatialities (Binz et al., 2020). Further research into group formation and composition is needed to better understand the spatial dynamics of cohousing and to critically examine Arbell's (2022) argument that cohousing awareness spreads not locally, but among like-minded, predominantly white, highly educated, middle-to-high-income individuals. Furthermore, an analysis of power relations in the sustainability transition of housing is necessary to facilitate deeper understanding of the cohousing context and its upscaling (Power & Mee, 2020).

This analysis is key to understanding and proceeding with the upscaling and replication processes of the cohousing niche. Moreover, to improve the integration of multi-scalar effects on the housing transition, in-depth investigations analysing the geographical aspects of cohousing are recommended. More specifically, future research should especially focus on recommendations for improvement and institutionalisation of replication strategies. Furthermore, a region-specific guideline to contextualize cohousing in the Upper Austrian housing sector is yet to be developed. To overcome power imbalances, disadvantaged groups need to be empowered to give them the capacity to mobilize resources and institutions.

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates the Upper Austrian cohousing dynamics and contributes to the transition literature with the aim to sustainably transform the housing sector in Austria.

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Appendix A – Tables and Figures

Table A1 – Project Mapping

The table on the following pages includes the results of the mapping approach. Cohousing projects are assigned to the numbers 1 to 31; mapping category are highlighted in bold with grey background and the tables are split for better visualisation. Discontinued projects are highlighted in blue, while projects in their formation phase are highlighted in orange.

Nr.	Name	Adresse	Planungsbeginn	Bezug/Abbruch	Anzahl Wohneinheiten	Wohntypologie
1	Cohousing Holzstraße	Holzstraße 15, 4020 Linz	2018	2023	19	Geschosswohnbau
2	Willi*Fred	Graben 3, 4020 Linz	2012	2015	14	Geschosswohnbau
3	Guglmugl	Zaunerweg 3-5, 4020 Linz	1998	2000	32	Atriumhäuser
4	Les Paletuviérs 1 / Wohndorf Leonding	Wöberweg 6-8, 4060 Leonding	1974	1975	16	Atriumhäuser
5	3er-Hof	Schafferstrasse 19, 4060 Leonding	2014	2014	10	Hofkollektiv
6	LP 12 / Thürnau 2	Haushofenstr. 1+3, 4062 Kirchberg-Thening	1991	1992	16	Atriumhäuser
7	LP 22 / GeNaWo	Mayrgutstraße 78, 4451 Garsten	2012	2016	20	Atriumhäuser
8	Belehof	Rutzensmooser Ring 12, 4845 Rutzenmoos	2016	2017	7	Hofkollektiv
9	GrafenAuenland	Grafenau 3, 4131 Niederkappel	2019	2020	3	Hofkollektiv
10	Kommunikative Wohnanlage Wilhering	Neudeckerweg 7, 4073 Mühlbach	1988	1989	8	Reihenhäuser
11	LP 13 / Neuhofen	Bachstraße 10, 4501 Neuhofen a.d. Krems	1991	1993	10	Atriumhäuser
12	LP 15 / Gaumberg, Wohnoase	Weesestraße 3, 4060 Leonding/Linz	1992	1994	25	Atriumhäuser
13	LP 19 / Linz	Niederreithstraße 10, 4020 Linz	2001	2002	6	Reihenhäuser
14	LP 2 / Wilhering	Atriumweg 16-18, 4073 Wilhering	1975	1977	16	Atriumhäuser
15	LP 3 / Thürnau 1	Obermayrstr. 7+10 u. Friedgasse 1, 4062 Krichberg-Thening	1984	1986	24	Atriumhäuser
16	LP 20 / Thürnau 3	Haushoferstraße 15, 4062 Kirchberg-Thening	1991	1992	35	Atriumhäuser
17	Wohnpark Schwalbenhof	Wienering 4a, 4791 Rainbach im Innkreis	1995	1996	13	Geschosswohnbau
18	Haus Wiederstein / Wohnen mit Service	Kleinzell 10, 4115 Kleinzell i. M.	2019	2025	10	Geschosswohnbau
19	Haus der flexiblen Bewohner	4040 Linz-Haselgraben	1969	1979	11	Geschosswohnbau
20	Wohnanlage Biesenfeld	4040 Linz-Urfahr	1970	1981	656	Geschosswohnbau
21	Wohnprojekt Waldeck	Koglstraße 4, 4801 Traunkirchen	2024	i.P.	k.A.	Geschosswohnbau
22	Doma - Dorf Mal Anders	k.A.	2024	i.P.	ca. 25	Geschosswohnbau
23	Cohousing Zusammen-Wachsen	k.A.	2023	i.P.	mind. 5	k.A.
24	Wohnwal	k.A.	k.A.	i.P.	k.A.	k.A.
25	Poltenhof	Steigersdorf 1, 4212 Neumarkt im Mühlkreis	2025	i.P.	01.Mär	Hofkollektiv
26	Wohnwerkstatt Innviertel	k.A.	k.A.	i.P.	k.A.	k.A.
27	Jelka	Starhembergstraße 58, 4020 Linz	2019	2023	k.A.	k.A.
28	Wohnprojekt Sankt Johann	St. Johann 7, 4172 St. Johann am Wimberg	2022	2024	10	k.A.
29	Gemeinsam Dahoam / Höhnhart	5251 Höhnhart	2021	2023	k.A.	k.A.
30	Gemeinsam Dahoam / Ried i. I.	4919 Ried im Innkreis	2021	2023	k.A.	k.A.
31	Cooheim	4100 Ottensheim	2015	2018	k.A.	k.A.

Nr.	Baumaßnahme	Planung	Bauträger:in	Initiierung	Wohnrechtsform
1	Neubau	Architekt	CoHousing Holzstraße 15; errichtung GmbH	Familie Paulischin	Individualeigentum
2	Bestandsnutzung	k.A.	k.A.	Verein Willi*Fred	Kollektiveigentum
3	Neubau	Architekt	GIWOG	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
4	Neubau	Architekt	Verein zur Errichtung der Analge	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
5	Bestandsnutzung	k.A.	k.A.	Privatpersonen	Individualeigentum
6	Neubau	Architekt	LAWOG	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
7	Bestandsnutzung	Architekt		Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
8	Neubau + Bestandsnutzung	Eigenplanung	Verein Bele Cohousing	Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
9	Bestandsnutzung	k.A.	k.A.	Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
10	Neubau	Architekt	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
11	Neubau	Architekt	LAWOG	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
12	Neubau	Architekt	LAWOG	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
13	Neubau	Architekt	GIWOG	Fritz Matzinger	k.A.
14	Neubau	Architekt	alle Bauwerber	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
15	Neubau	Architekt	LAWOG	Fritz Matzinger	Individualeigentum
16	Neubau	Architekt	NEUE HEIMAT OOE	k.A.	Miete
17	Neubau + Bestandsnutzung	Eigenplanung	k.A.	Privatpersonen	Miete
18	Neubau + Bestandsnutzung	Architekt	ProNah Genossenschaft	Gemeinde Kleinzell	Miete
19	Neubau	Architekt	gemeinnützige Wohnbaugenossenschaft Eigenheim	Werkgruppe Linz	Individualeigentum
20	Neubau	Architekt	VLW (Vereinigung dreier Linzer Wohngenossenschaften)	k.A.	Individualeigentum
21	Bestandsnutzung	k.A.	k.A.	Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
22	Neubau + Bestandsnutzung	Eigenplanung	i.P.	Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
23	Bestandsnutzung	k.A.	k.A.	Privatpersonen	Kollektiveigentum
24	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
25	Bestandsnutzung	Eigenplanung / Architekt	k.A.	Besitzer des Hofes	k.A.
26	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
27	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
28	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
29	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
30	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
31	Neubau	k.A.	k.A.	Verein Cooheim	k.A.

Nr.	Verwaltungsform	Eigentümer	Vertragsverhältnis	Region
1	WEG	Wohnungseigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Stadt
2	gemeinnütziger Verein	Willy-Fred GmbH	HabiTAT Modell	Stadt
3	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Stadt
4	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
5	gemeinnütziger Verein	Fritz	HabiTAT Modell	Land
6	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
7	GmbH	Genawo GmbH	Miete + Gesellschaftsanteile	Land
8	gemeinnütziger Verein	Verein Bele Couhousing	Kaufvertrag	Land
9	gemeinnütziger Verein	Verein GrafenAuenland	Kaufvertrag	Land
10	WEG	BewohnerInnen	Kaufvertrag	Land
11	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
12	k.A.	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
13	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	Suburban
14	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
15	WEG	private Eigentümer*innen	Kaufvertrag	Land
16	k.A.	Bauträgerin	Mietvertrag	Land
17	Eigentum	Karl Schmid	Mietvertrag	Land
18	gemeinnütziger Verein	Gemeinde Kleinzell	Mietverträge, Baurechtsvertrag	Land
19	WEG	k.A	Kaufvertrag	Suburban
20	WEG	k.A.	Eigentumsvertrag	Stadt
21	gemeinnütziger Verein	Verein Gemeinsam Leben	Mietvertrag + Vereinsmitglied	Land
22	gemeinnütziger Verein	i.P.	Baurecht	Land
23	gemeinnütziger Verein	Verein oder GesmbH	k.A.	k.A.
24	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
25	k.A.	k.A	k.A.	Land
26	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
27	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
28	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
29	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
30	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
31	Verein	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.

Nr.	Gemeinschaftsanlagen	Werkstatt	Gemeinschaftsküche	Schwimmbad	Sauna	Co-working
1	150 qm Innen- / 200 qm Außenfläche	1	1	0	0	0
2	1069 qm Wohnen, 212 qm Gemeinschaft, 430 qm Vereine	1	1	0	1	1
3	499 qm Räume + 132 qm Hallenbad, Sauna; 1 großes Atrium = Wintergarten	0	0	1	1	0
4	570 qm + 1500 qm Gemeinschaftsgarten, 2 Atrien,, 4 Wintergärten	0	0	1	1	0
5	gesamter Vierkannthof, private Wagenplätze, privat Zimmer	1	1	0	0	0
6	Gemüsegarten, Salettl, Wintergärten	1	1	0	1	0
7	2800 qm Nutzfläche	1	1	1	1	0
8	k.A.	1	1	0	1	1
9	k.A.	1	1	0	0	1
10	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
11	Freifläche: 2.890 qm, Kinderspielplatz, Gemüsegarten, Feuerstelle, 1 Atrium	0	0	0	1	0
12	k.A.	0	0	1	1	0
13	k.A.		1	0	0	0
14	Freifläche: 3.200qm, Kleinkinderspielplatz, Wintergärten	0	0	1	1	0
15	3 Atriumhöfe	0	0	0	1	0
16	k.A.	1	1	0	1	0
17	Innenhof, Carports	0	1	0	1	0
18	Innenhof unten mit Gewerbe, oben privat	1	1	0	0	0
19	wohnlich gestaltete Stiegenvorplätze	0	0	0	0	0
20	1200 qm	0	0		0	0
21	Haus mit 2 ha Wald, 1 ha Wiese/Garten	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
22	k.A.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
23	k.A.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
24	k.A.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
25	k.A.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
26	k.A.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
27	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
28	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
29	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
30	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
31	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.

Nr.	Kinderraum	Dachgarten	(Dach)-Terrasse gemeinschaftlich	Seminarraum	Veranstaltungsraum	Multifunkt.Raum	Sonst.Gem.Raum	Partykeller	Waschküche	Bibliothek	Kindergarten
1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
3	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	1	i.P.	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	1	1	Bastelecke	0	1	0	0
7	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
9	0	0	0	1	1	0	Verarbeitungsküche, Stallungen, Garagen, Yogaraum, Lagerräume, Keller, Speisekammern	0	1	0	0
10	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
11	0	0	0	0	0	1	Gartengeräteraum	0	1	1	0
12	1	0	1	0	0	0	Wintergarten	0	1	0	0
13	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
14	0	0	0	0	0	1	Erdkeller	0	0	0	0
15	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
16	0	0	0	0	0	1	Erdkeller	0	1	0	0
17	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
18	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
20	0	0	0	0	1	1	Gemeinschaftssaal	0	0	0	1
21	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
22	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
23	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
24	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
25	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
26	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
27	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
28	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
29	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
30	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
31	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.

Nr.	Schule	Gästewohnung/ Zimmer	Foodcoop	Gastro	Gewerbe	Car/Mobility-sharing	Gemeinschaftsgarten	Soliwohnung	Musik/Proberaum	Fitnessraum	Atelier(s)
1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
5	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
6	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
7	0	1	0	0	0	k.A.	1	0	0	0	0
8	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
9	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
10	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
11	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
15	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
16	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
18	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	0	0	0	0	1	k.A.	1	0	0	0	0
21	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
22	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
23	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
24	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
25	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
26	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.	i.P.
27	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
28	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
29	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
30	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.
31	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.	k.A.

Nr.	Besonderheiten	Wohnbauförderung
1	nachhaltige Holzbauweise	
2		
3	Wintergarten	
4	2 Atrien, eines mit Galerie; 4 Wintergärten	Keine / Fertigstellungskredit für einzelne Eigentümer vom Landes-Wohn- und Siedlungsfond
5	Solidarische Landwirtschaft, Wohneinheiten im Ausbau	
6	1. Preis: Schöner Bauen in Oberösterreich	
7	Unterstützung durch Gemeinde und Bürgermeister	Land OÖ
8	Hofladen, SoLaWi	Förderung für energierelevante Sanierungen
9		keine
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15	3 Atrien, Wintergarten	
16	Kinderspielplatz, Salettl, Fahrradschuppen und Gemüsegarten	
17	Photovotailk, EEG Eigerding	
18		
19	flexibles Bausystem, Versuchsbau wurde zum Gemeinschaftshaus	Wohnbauförderung des Landes OÖ, Versuchsbau gefördert durch Wohnbauforschungsmittel
20	erstes partizipatives Wohnprojekt OÖ	Förderungsdarlehen durch das Land OÖ, Forschungsmittel des Bautenministeriums
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		
26		
27	gescheiterte Verhandlungen zw. Baugruppe u. Eigentümerin	
28		
29		
30		
31	fehlende Umwidmung seitens der Gemeinde	

Nr.	Quelle 1	Quelle 2	Quelle 3
1	https://www.cohousing-holzstrasse.at	Projektbesuch	Formular
2	https://willy-fred.org	Projektbesuch	Videointerview IniZuFuß
3	http://www.guglmugl.net	http://matzinger.at/projekte/ls1/LP17%20Gugl%20Mugl,12009	.
4	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	Freisitzer et al., 1987, S.126ff.	
5	https://3er.h0f.at	Projektbesuch	
6	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	http://matzinger.at/projekte/ls2/LP12%20Thürnau%20II.12022	
7	https://genawo.at/	https://www.bauwelt.de/das-heft/heftarchiv/Ein-Baum-als-Modell-fuer-den-Wohnbau-Fritz-Matzinger-Architektur-Konzept-2615435.html	
8	https://www.belehof.at/	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	Formular
9	https://grafenauenland.at/	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	Formular
10	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform		
11	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform		
12	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	http://matzinger.at/projekte/ls1/LP15%20Gaumberg,12005	
13	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	http://matzinger.at/projekte/ls1/LP19%20Niederreithstr.,12010	
14	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	http://matzinger.at/projekte/ls2/LP2%20Hitzing,12014	
15	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform		
16	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform		
17	https://www.facebook.com/www.sbau1.at/?locale=de_DE	https://www.meinbezirk.at/schaerding/c-lokales/die-co2-bilanz-immer-im-blick_a4699817	Telefonat mit Karl Schmid
18	https://www.wohnenmitservice.at/freie-wohneinheiten/	https://www.agenda-zukunft.at/projekte/innovative-modellprojekte/wohnen-mit-service-in-kleinzell#top-nav	Interview, Projektbesuch
19	Freisitzer et al., 1987, S.130ff.	https://www.espazium.ch/de/aktuelles/flexibles-wohnen-linz-ein-zwischenbericht-nach-50-jahren	
20	Freisitzer et al., 1987, S.134ff.		
21	https://www.wohnprojekt-waldeck.at/daswaldeck/#W4		
22	https://www.dorfmalanders.at/	https://www.inigbw.org/wohnprojekte-plattform	Formular
23	https://corinnablum.at		
24	https://wohnwal.at		
25	https://www.wohneningemeinschaft.at/suchen-interessierte-fuer-wohnen-in-gemeinschaft/		Formular
26	https://wohnwerkstatt-innviertel.at		
27	https://www.instagram.com/hausprojekt_jelka/	https://de.cba.media/590066	https://original-magazin.at/es-ist-auch-anders-moeglich
28	https://wohnprojekt-stjohann.at	https://www.gemeinsamwohnen.at/links/	
29	https://inn-salzach-euregio.at/2023/05/22/gemeinsam-dahoam-3/	https://inn-salzach-euregio.at/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Flyer-Baugruppe-Hoehnhart_Final-2.pdf	https://hubfour.at/colivinghoenhart
30	https://inn-salzach-euregio.at/2023/05/22/gemeinsam-dahoam-3/	https://inn-salzach-euregio.at/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Wohnen-in-Ried.pdf	
31	https://www.meinbezirk.at/oberoesterreich/c-lokales/kein-baugrund-fuer-cooheim_a2393877	https://www.nachrichten.at/oberoesterreich/linz/Ottensheim-Gemeinderat-entscheidet-heute-ueber-innovatives-Wohnprojekt;art66,2798764	

Table A2 - Coding System

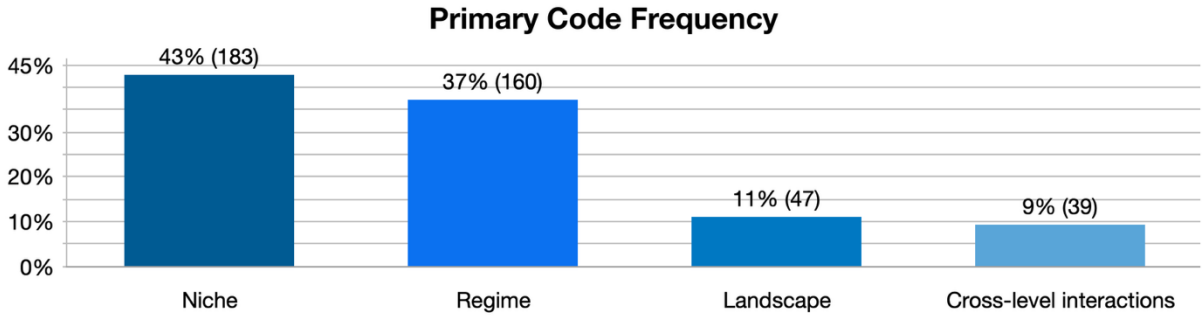
The following table includes the coding system, used for qualitative content analysis. It encompasses the primary codes based on the MLP levels, subcodes, code definition, typical indicators and literature reference.

Primary Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Typical Indicators	Sources
Niche	Niche_environmental benefit	Environmental advantages of co- housing at project level	Shared resources, reduced energy use, land-use efficiency	Daly, 2017
Niche	Niche_social benefit	Social, health, and well-being benefits for residents	Social cohesion, reduced loneliness, mutual support	Bianchi & Costa, 2024
Niche	Niche_economic benefit	Economic advantages for residents or initiatives	Below-market rents, cost-sharing, financial security	Reyes et al., 2022
Niche	Niche_grassroot actors	Individuals or groups initiating or driving projects	Residents, activists, cooperatives	Smith & Seyfang, 2013
Niche	Niche_organizational barrier	Structural challenges within projects	Legal complexity, lack of expertise, time constraints	CO-HOPE, 2025
Niche	Niche_internal conflicts	tensions in the project	Decision-making conflicts, participation fatigue	Gily, 2023
Niche	Niche_civil society initiatives	Organized civil-society activities supporting co-housing	Associations, networks, advocacy groups	Gily, 2023
Niche	Niche_scaling strategies	Approaches to expand, replicate, or stabilize projects	Networking, knowledge transfer, replication models	Smith & Seyfang, 2013
Niche	Niche_best practice	best practice examples	indiviudal projects in Upper Austria	Gily, 2023
Regime	Regime_policy instruments	Formal policy tools affecting co-housing	Housing strategies, planning instruments	Steinhoff, 2025
Regime	Regime_funding and subsidies	Public financial support mechanisms	Grants, subsidies, public loans	Fluch et al., n.d.
Regime	Regime_political acceptability	Degree of political support for co-housing	Cross-party approval, public legitimacy	Ullrich-Schneider & Stampfl, 2022
Regime	Regime_political resistance	Political opposition or ideological rejection	Conservative parties, market-oriented arguments	Vergara-Perucich, 2025
Regime	Regime_institutional barrier	Institutional obstacles within administrations	Bureaucracy, fragmented responsibilities	Vergara-Perucich, 2025
Regime	Regime_path dependencies	Lock-ins of dominant housing models	Homeownership norms, market-led development	Laswon, 2010
Regime	Regime_replication strategies	Institutional approaches to scaling co-housing	Standardized models, pilot-to-program	Dijk et al., 2019
Regime	Regime_actors network	Key institutional and political actors	Municipalities, planners, ministries	Förster et al., 2020
Regime	Regime_best practice examples	Successful policy-supported cases	Model municipalities	Butzlaff et al., 2025
Regime	Regime_municpal support	Local-level political or administrative backing	Land provision, advisory services	Ullrich-Schneider & Stampfl, 2022
Regime	Regime_enabling regulations	Legal frameworks that facilitate co-housing	Zoning flexibility, cooperative law	Steinhoff, 2025
Regime	Regime_social innovation	Recognition of co-housing as social innovation	Innovation agendas, policy labs	Dijk et al., 2019
Regime	Regime_community development	Role of co-housing in local development	Neighborhood revitalization, inclusion	Leutgöb & Weiser, 2025
Regime	Regime_public awareness	public notice of co-housing, familiarity with the concept	public knowledge, media articles, publications	
Landscape	landscape_ecological crisis	Environmental and climate pressures	Climate change, land consumption	Schirpke et al., 2023
Landscape	landscape_housing and affordability crisis	Structural housing shortages and cost pressures	Rising rents, access problems	Matějková & Tichá, 2025
Landscape	landscape_demographic change	Population-related shifts affecting housing	Aging society, household changes	Wonneberger, 2018
Landscape	landscape_value shifts	Changing societal norms and preferences	Post-ownership values, sustainability norms	Geels, 2005
Landscape	landscape_crisis-driven attention	Increased focus due to crises	Energy crisis, COVID-19 effects	Geels, 2005
Landscape	landscape_urban rural differences	Spatial disparities shaping housing conditions	City–countryside differences	Gily, 2023
cross-level interaction	Innovation barrier	Factors hindering innovation across levels	Policy mismatch, financing gaps	Dijk et al., 2019
cross-level interaction	Innovation enablers	Conditions supporting innovation diffusion	Crisis pressure, political champions	Lang et al., 2020
cross-level interaction	Niche-regime interactions	Interactions between projects and institutions	Pilot projects, policy feedback	Czischke, 2018
cross-level interaction	Power relations	unbalanced power dynamics between stakeholder	different power positions of actors	Avelino, 2017
cross-level interaction	Scaling and replication	Processes of diffusion and mainstreaming	Upscaling strategies, institutionalization	Devine-y et al., 2023

Table A3 - Project Visits

Project	Name	Date of Visit
Project 1	Cohousing Holzstraße	01.08.2025
Project 2	Willi*Fred	01.08-02.08.2025
Project 3	Guglmugl	02.08.2025
Project 4	Les Paletuviers 1 / Wohndorf Leonding	02.08.2025
Project 5	3er-Hof	02.08-03.08.2025
Project 6	Les Paletuviers 2 / Thürnau 2	03.08.2025
Project 7	Les Paletuviers 22 / GeNaWo	03.08.2025
Project 8	Haus Wiederstein	16.12.2025

Figure A1 - Code Frequency



Appendix B - Interview Guide

The Research Question:

How can cohousing projects in Upper Austria contribute to a sustainability transition in Austrias' housing sector and what conditions are required to scale up their environmental, social and economic benefits within the region?

The Interview Questions (in German):

1. Welche ökologischen, ökonomischen und sozialen Probleme siehst du als treibende Kraft für Gemeinschaftlichen Wohnbau in Oberösterreich?

2. Welche Vor- und Nachteile siehst du in Gemeinschaftlichen Wohnprojekten?

3. Welche Entwicklungen haben dazu beigetragen, dass Cohousing mehr Aufmerksamkeit erhält?

4. Welche politischen Lösungen oder Ansätze hältst du für technisch machbar und gesellschaftlich akzeptabel, um Cohousing in Oberösterreich zu fördern?

5. Welche Rolle spielen Akteur*innen wie Planer*innen, NGOs oder politische Entscheidungsträger*innen bei der Entwicklung solcher Lösungen?

6. Gibt es Beispiele für erfolgreiche politische Maßnahmen oder Programme, die Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen unterstützen?

7. Gibt es Parteien oder Bewegungen, die das Thema Cohousing behindern und Barrieren für eine Transformation im Wohnungssektor darstellen?

8. Welche Personen oder Organisationen gelten als Treiber für Veränderungen im Bereich Cohousing in Oberösterreich?

9. Welche Möglichkeiten gibt es, sich (über)regional zu vernetzen, um von gemeinschaftlichem Wohnen zu erfahren und wie könnten mögliche Netzwerke ausgebaut und professionalisiert werden?

10. Gibt es regionale Unterschiede in den Rahmenbedingungen bzw. Erfolgen der Wohnprojekte in Oberösterreich?

11. Welche Lehren gibt es aus (miss)erfolgreichen Beispielen in Oberösterreich?

Appendix C – Questionnaire

The Following questionnaire in German was sent via email to the cohousing projects as part of the quantitative mapping approach. Results are presented in Table A1.

Questionnaire

Name des Projekts:

Adresse:

- Jahr des Planungsbeginn (Gruppengründung):
- Jahr des Bezugs:
- Anzahl Wohneinheiten:
- Wohntypologie: (ankreuzen)
  - ☐ Geschosswohnbau
  - ☐ Einfamilienhäuser
  - ☐ Mischform
  - ☐ Atriumhäuser
  - ☐ Maisonettenwohnungen
  - ☐ Hofkollektiv
  - ☐ Reihenhäuser
  - ☐ Clusterwohnungen
  - ☐ Doppelhäuser
  - ☐ Sonstiges:

- Baumaßnahmen:
  - ☐ Naubau
  - ☐ Bestandsnutzung
  - ☐ Mix
- Planung:
  - ☐ Eigenplanung
  - ☐ Architekt
  - ☐ Andere:

- Bauträger*in:

- Initiierung (Wer? - Personen, Organisationen, etc.):

- Wohnrechtsform:
  - ☐ Individualeigentum
  - ☐ Miete
  - ☐ Miete mit Eigentumsoption
  - ☐ Kollektiveigentum
  - ☐ Sonstiges:

- Verwaltungsform:
  - ☐ Verein

☐Sonstiges:

- Eigentümer*innen:
- Vertragsverhältnis:
  - ☐Mietvertrag
  - ☐Kaufvertrag
  - ☐Sonstiges:

- Wohnbauförderung:
  - ☐ keine Förderungen
  - ☐Förderungen, welche?

- Welche Gemeinschaftsanlagen / geteilte Anlagen besitzt ihr/e Siedlung/Gebäude?

INFO+	Bitte ankreuzen	Zusatzinfo
Werkstatt	☐	
Gemeinschaftsküche	☐	
Sauna	☐	
Co-working space	☐	
Kinder/Jugendraum	☐	
Dachgarten	☐	
(Dach)-Terrasses	☐	
Seminarraum	☐	
Veranstaltungsraum	☐	
Multifunktionsraum	☐	
Sonst. Gemeinschafts Räume	☐	
Waschküche	☐	
Bibliothek	☐	
Kindergarten	☐	
Schule	☐	
Gästewohnung	☐	
Foodcoop	☐	
Gastro	☐	
Gewerbe	☐	
Car-sharing	☐	
Gemeinschaftsgarten	☐	
Soliwohnung	☐	
Musik/Proberaum	☐	
Fitness	☐	
Ateliers	☐	

Appendix D - Statement of AI Usage

No generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used for research purposes, however translation, revision and pre-weriting was partly conducted with AI. G*ood Tape* was used for the purpose of interview transcription. This transcription software is fully GDPR compliant and ISO certified. All files are processed on secure servers within the EU. The recordings are not utilized to train public models artificial intelligence and ensures that the research remains exclusive property of the author. *DeepL Write* was used to improve sentence structure, avoid word repetitions, and correct grammar mistakes, while *DeepL* translated the Abstract to German. *Claude.ai* corrected wrong formations in APA7 and helped to develop a structure for the qualitative research analysis. Following the guidelines of the University of Vienna, detailed explanation is provided in Table C.

Table C

AI-based tool	**Use**	**Affected section**	**Note**
Good Tape	Transcription of Interviews and Videos	Qualitative Results	
DeepL	Translation English to German	Kurzfassung	Translation was accepted with minor changes.
DeepL Write	Linguistic revision	Overall text sections	The suggested corrections have been widely accepted.
Claude.ai	Development of a structure for the qualitative analysis, revision of the references and in-text citation in APA7, support for QGIS	Structure of coding system (Table A2), References, **Figure *4***	AI helped to generate ideas how to guide the qualitative analysis. Suggestions were revised by the author.