

# The Importance of Housing Systems In Safeguarding Social Cohesion in Europe

## SOCOHO

in the recent past the notion of “social cohesion” has been one of the central issues in social policies of the European Union. However, housing provision has not been very much in the centre of the respective debates, although (national and regional) housing systems may play a decisive roll as to what extent they contribute to a cohesive society. Not much research is focussing on this almost neglected aspect of social cohesion.

This study which SRZ Urban+Regional Research, Vienna, was commissioned to carry out by the European Union and to co-ordinate five additional partners, has just been completed.

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# Abstract

The SOCOHO project funded under the Fifth Framework Programme and, specifically, the key action for the improvement of socio-economic knowledge base, was intended to research which challenges to the housing systems of the individual countries result from the current crisis of social cohesion and how the various housing systems are responding to these challenges by international comparison.

The approach adopted by the SOCOHO project combines a comparative analysis of the European Household Panel data with supplementary research in six selected countries (Austria, France, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom). The following report presents the results at EU-15 level.

The SOCOHO findings show that the housing systems of the EU member states are very important factors in the maintenance of social cohesion. They fulfil this role by exerting decisive influence on the level of risk of poverty, the extent of social and ethnic segregation, and the dealing of households with the current transformation of family and demographic structures.

At the same time the results from this report also show that the framework conditions created in the last decades on a European level clearly limit the options open to the member states in the area of housing policy: On the one hand a restrictive budget policy was enforced, which led to reductions in housing subsidies, while on the other hand, the European Union established an agreement of role allocation between the market, the state and the social economy, which increasingly takes the public authorities' legitimation for an efficient regulation of the housing markets. In this way, besides the economic basis, the political basis of the housing policy was also undermined. Thus the European Union (in sharp contrast to the pathos of the European Social Policy Agenda) reduced the ability of the national housing systems to secure social cohesion.

To re-establish the action potential of the national housing policies, a new definition of the role allocation between market, state and social economy on a European level would be necessary. Therefore, in spite of the lack of a formal EU housing mandate, the strengthening of the national housing policies to secure social cohesion would have deep consequences on a European level.