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SUSTAINABLE HOUSING POLICY ORIENTATION IN EUROPE

TRVALO UDRŽATEĽNÉ SMEROVANIE BYTOVEJ POLITIKY V EURÓPE

Abstract

When there was the lack of housing, the main objective of housing policy in Europe was to build more houses. Later multiple objectives became typical for housing policies encompassing, macroeconomic and environmental objectives, health policies, social inclusion and urban regeneration. The important issues are also the quality, affordability and sustainability of housing.

Zabezpečenie trvalo udržateľného rozvoja v Európe, znižovanie spotreby energie a zvyšovanie podielu obnoviteľných zdrojov má tak technickú ako aj ekonomickú a sociálnu dimenziu. Usporné byty, kompaktný druh zástavby, vysoká kvalita života v mestských štvrtiach, znižuje požiadavky na dopravu a často vedú aj šetreniu nákladov domácností, k odstraňovaniu sociálne patologických javov a k ďalším priaznivým dopadom. Z tohto dôvodu sa v Európskych krajinách hľadajú spôsoby ako prostredníctvom nástrojov bytovej politiky zabezpečiť trvalo udržateľný rozvoj.

Defining sustainability

Fundamental physical and ecological limits to growth are central to the idea of sustainability. If our civilization is going to survive we need to maintain its capacity of different eco-systems for the renewal. Sustainability related to housing reflects the extent to which the strategies encompass social, environmental, and economic dimensions of housing policy. There are several perspectives of sustainable housing.

1. A construction perspective referring to:

- lifespan that depends on the quality of the building materials used and their utilisation;
- adaptability –the housing has to be adapted to the needs of successive occupiers as well as to changing needs of the same occupant in the accommodation.

2 A social and economic perspective referring to the ‘viable’ characteristic of accommodation for the occupier (tenant or owner) which includes:

- affordability, based on the ability of the occupiers to cover the direct costs of the accommodation without having to neglect other essential needs (balanced diet, health, education, culture, etc.); □ indirect costs such as commuting and travel costs linked to the location of the housing;
- impact of housing including residential environment on the physical and mental health of the occupiers;

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- psychological and social function the residential environment: the extend to which the place of living encourages the development of social networks and various types of social solidarity.

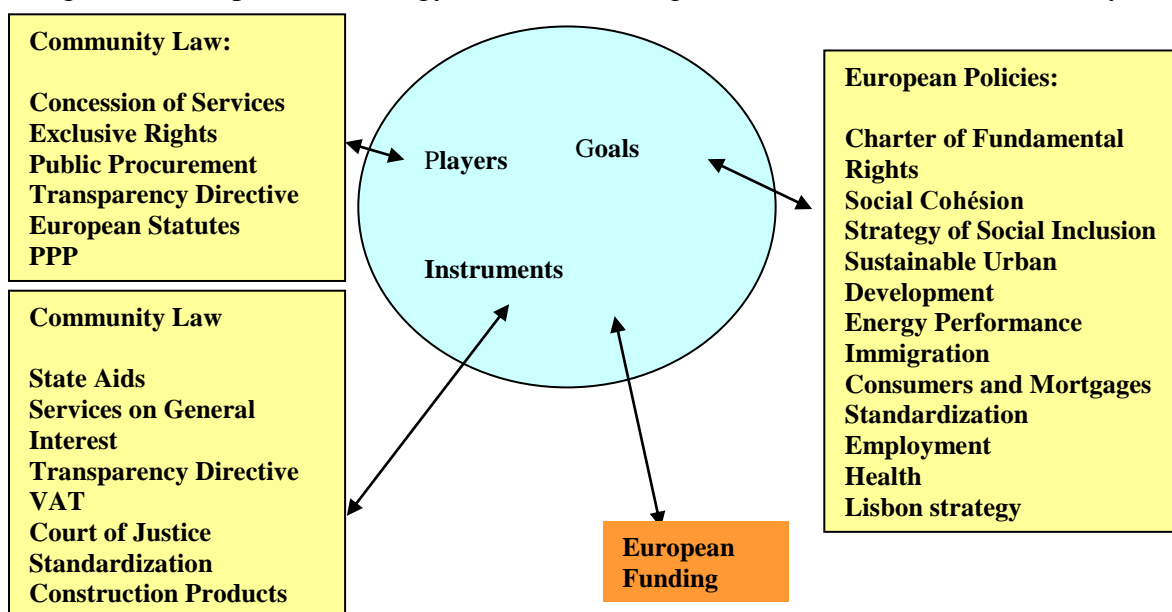
3. An eco-efficiency perspective, which is aimed on increase in well-being while at the same time limiting the consumption of resources. This aspect means the rational and efficient use of natural non-renewable resources, both in the construction and the use of accommodation, This concerns energy used (directly and indirectly), construction materials and the spatial use of land. The efficient land management should aim to limit the use of land across a range of human activities including housing.

European aspects of housing policies

From the European perspective the housing policy is the domain of the member states. The subsidiarity principle gives quite a large marge d'manoeuvre to member states and in practice there are quite large differences among the housing policy instruments in the different countries. Such situation is justified by differences stemming from the historical legacy of the institutional systems, climate, and socio-economic peculiarities in different countries and in particular by the property rights differences, taxes systems etc. In the existing situation the introduction of the uniform instruments of the housing policies European countries, could lead to quite different results in various countries.

Removing the barriers between the member states, the introduction of the new European regulation is however gradually limiting the possibilities to develop principally different approaches to the housing policy in the member states.

The impact of community policies on the housing sector is very real and on the increase: taxation of social housing (VAT), public contracts, services of general economic interest, rules of competition, system of State aid, consumer protection in terms of mortgage loans, building sector and products, energy-efficient buildings, are all elements of Community law



Picture 1 Influence of the European policies on housing policies of member states

which increasingly challenge the instruments and players of housing policies at the risk of jeopardising their effectiveness and their missions (see the Picture 1). Moreover the Lisbon strategy reiterates the question of the social inclusion. Housing is considered to be one of the core elements in the in the combat against social exclusion.

THE ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE HOUSING POLICIES IN SOME EU COUNTRIES

The sustainability questions in UK are mostly viewed in the context of the community approach, which is the synonym of the defense of collective interests that enables to relieve the housing market offer reserved to the solvent consumers, that fragments the cities. Its ambition is to reinforce the capacities, and provide the decisional power for the socially weaker population. We can find here the worry about the better integration of women, ethnical minorities, young and old people etc. This approach leads to higher local decision-making power, however when combined with refuse to use stronger instruments of planning policy, it is not very effective in practice.

More scientific and technologic approaches are typical for Austria and Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavian countries- Not only they use ecotechnologies (they possess advanced housing technologies), but also they developed lot of ecological regulation accompanied by the fiscal measures, that have the level effect on the ecological innovations.

For instance Denmark taxes emissions of CO₂, CFC and the halons, new construction materials and subsidizes renewable energies and the investments that are in favor to environment. Scandinavian countries and Netherlands apply also tax on CO₂. Such measures have the important effect on demand greening the economy and lifestyles. The environmental accounting system that is well developed in Scandinavian countries is the logical prolongation of these policies.

SOME INTERESTING INITIATIVES FROM CAISSE DES DÉPÔTS FROM FRANCE.

Caisse des Dépôts wants to stimulate the energy efficiency of the housing development by proposing the Energy performance credit for the new housing construction that comply to THPE² standard. The Caisse des Dépôts will fund up to 7% of total costs of enhanced operations. The largest consumers of the energy are the old housing units. Caisse des Dépôts will therefore support plan Energy Climate 2008-2012 by providing 80 centims the rate for pool of credits of € 1 billion from its own equity until 2010. The credit pool will enable to fund the revitalization of the housing units that meet the certain number of energy criteria. The credits will be available since 1 quarter of 2008. The credits will enable to rehabilitate 180,000 housing units during three years. For this reason the Caisse des Dépôts shall mobilize € 57 million.

Moreover the Caisse des Dépôts will finance the engineering studies that will enable to enhance the quality of thermic isolation, use of renewable sources of energy, and develop more efficient distribution systems for the hot water. Also Caisse des Dépôts will give the preference to funding of ecocities. Caisse des Dépôts will also support the new experiments in rehabilitation, high-energy performance and the access of the low-to moderate-income people to housing proprietorship. The bank will provide for that reason €300 million in 2007.

CONCLUSIONS FOR SLOVAKIA

Slovakia, as the other countries of EU have to respect the European directives that require from member countries to introduce the practical measures that would enable to meet the

² THPE is abbreviation which means très haute performance énergétique – very high energy performance standard, that corresponds at least to 20% lower energy consumption as defined by the French regulation – the article 9 of „l'arrêté du 24 mai 2006“ that concerns the thermic characteristics of the new buildings and the new parts of building

goals of sustainable development globally and in particular in housing sector. The faster progress can be achieved by undertaking the following actions:

- It is necessary to study to which extend the housing policy measures and subsidy programs respect the climate goals and how they can be eventually improved.
- It is necessary to provide some financial sources for the experimentation with the novel technological solutions of the housing, the transfer of technologies, innovative approaches to funding the environmentally friendly housing development.
- It may be a good idea to make the partnerships of government with major providers of the housing credits in Slovakia to find together the solutions that would support the environmentally friendly development.
- The possibility to tax environmentally unfriendly development that leads to congestion of the cities, high energy costs, etc. should be explored further.
- There is the need for comparative research in the area of sustainable housing development and housing policies that would enable to understand these processes better from a European perspective. There is an urgent need to have clear and functional indicators which can be applied to track progress even in less 'quantifiable' areas such as access to decent and affordable housing.

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