

# Contradictions of Urban Renewal in Vienna: How social democratic legacy aids neoliberalization

## Background and General Aim

In the last few decades Europe has been following the global trend of commodifying the human right to housing, and hence to decent living, in such a way that it caters directly to developers and investors and displaces the poor (Sassen 2021). Such development is seen as a typical expression of neoliberal governmental practices in urban settings (Maskovsky and Brash 2014).

This research project analyzes the policies that drive such development by scrutinizing contemporary urban renewal practices in Vienna, a city mediatized as progressive and inclusive in terms of its strategies of urban renewal. The focus is on contemporary participatory forms of urban renewal that are implemented under the banner of the policies of *Sanfte Stadterneuerung* (“gentle” or “soft urban renewal”).

## Research Question

Which exclusions do the policies of *Sanfte Stadterneuerung* induce and normalize?

Further:

- How are these policies implemented today?
- By which values is implementation guided today?
- How do broader processes of neoliberalization affect governance of urban renewal?

## Case: Urban Renewal in Vienna

**1960s:** emerging understanding of the intrinsic value of the 19th century buildings

**1970s:** introduction of *Sanfte Stadterneuerung* – urban renewal policies to preserve valuable housing stock while including the local population into regeneration matters

**1990s-2000s:** urban renewal strategies figure as best practice in UN Habitat programs

**2010:** city wins most prestigious award of UN Habitat for its policies of *Sanfte Stadterneuerung*

## Methods

- ethnographic fieldwork over a year with an Urban Renewal Office (*Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, a public service facility that implements *Sanfte Stadterneuerung*)
- In-depth interviews with practitioners, politicians and policy makers
- Analysis of policy documents (contemporary and from the 70s & 80s)

## Preliminary Results

Social democratic legacy from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century supports entrenchment of neoliberal governmental practices.

