



Call for Abstracts Urban Housing Instruments

Analysis, Concepts, and Practice

Housing is essential for cities. It determines quality of life, inclusion and community building, and is central for the social mix. Urban planning and infrastructure are based on housing needs, while sustainable housing contributes to climate mitigation. Challenges such as housing shortages, gentrification and rising rents are putting pressure on cities. At the same time, architecture and residential areas shape a city's identity and history. In addition to new construction, the preservation of existing housing is crucial to ensuring the availability of affordable housing in the long term. Housing is therefore a key issue for urban development and social justice.

The discussion about housing has a long history in Germany and is closely linked to social and economic developments. The role of housing has changed dramatically, particularly since the 1990s: privatization and the withdrawal of the state from social housing led to shortages, while urbanization and gentrification increased the pressure on the housing market. Housing management instruments therefore play a key role in shaping the housing market in cities in a sustainable and fair way. Urban housing instruments include, for example, municipal building land models, land funds, leasehold, conditional public tenders, quota regulations, urban development contracts, social conservation statutes or the general right of first refusal. They are intended to help make housing more accessible, improve its distribution and ensure affordable living.

These instruments operate between the conflicting priorities of economic, social, and ecological objectives: the usage of living space is a key issue here, as living space is increasingly unevenly distributed and its consumption per person has risen sharply in recent decades. Ensuring equal quality of housing for different socio-demographic groups represents another challenge, as does the modernization of the housing stock, which must be designed climate-neutral and sustainable. Economic factors also play an important role, for example with regard to the long-term effects of young people acquiring property for wealth accumulation. At the same time, there is a wide range of stakeholders, from local authorities to residents and political decision-makers. The needs of younger and older generations also differ considerably in some cases, which further complicates the development of housing concepts.

Given the large number of instruments available and the persistence of increasingly acute problems in many cities, there is a need to critically reflect on the various instruments and examine their limitations and potential. Although the evaluation of instruments that effectively address spatial issues has long been called for, there are considerable conceptual and methodological challenges. From a technical perspective, it is particularly difficult to model and empirically capture the underlying cause-effect relationships in all spatial assessments. This difficulty arises because the factors influencing spatial development are extremely complex. In addition, local contexts differ, making comparative studies between cities and regions equally challenging in terms of methodology.

The forthcoming special issue of **pnd – rethinking planning** is therefore dedicated to urban housing instruments, examines the underlying objectives and looks at their applications and (un)intended effects. There is a wide range of instruments, but at the same time they are interrelated in ways that can be synergistic or contradictory or reveal gaps in their interaction. Academic and practitioner perspectives are needed to cover the scope from analysis to implementation and to shed light on apparent conditions of success and failure.

Contributions for pnd 1/2026 edition

This call invites researchers, developers, and practitioners to share their experiences and systematically acquired knowledge of instruments related to housing in the urban context in Germany and in international comparison. Instruments range from analyses, communication and cooperation approaches, legal instruments, and financial support to active and creative action by public, private, and charitable actors. The focus can be on the preparation of good practice examples for individual instruments, comparative studies, or the critical reflection of projects and approaches (including failed ones). The aim of this issue is to bring knowledge from interdisciplinary contexts and different scales into the discussion.

We are looking for contributions that focus on:

- Testing instruments and procedures at the intersection of the real estate industry and neighborhood development
- Social security of housing, needs-based and affordable housing for different socio-demographic groups
- Conflict between promoting property acquisition for retirement provision and shaping demographic change with the aim of saving land
- Fundamental question of whether to prioritize new construction or improve the distribution of existing stock
- Perspectives on instruments aimed at making more efficient use of the housing stock and preventing misallocations (home swaps, tax incentives, etc.), or assess the impact of existing instruments on the distribution of living space
- Concrete approaches to space-saving housing (micro-apartments, etc.)
- Instruments for communal living, neighborhood renaissance and the consequences for land distribution and common areas

- Conceptualization and analysis of interactions of different instruments for urban housing, as well as understanding their possibilities and limitations

The call is aimed at a broad scientific and practical field in urban development, spatial planning, architecture, civil engineering, (real estate) economics, (urban) sociology, administrative and legal sciences.

Interested authors are invited to submit an **abstract of 1,500 to 2,000 characters (including spaces) by 9th May 2025 to neu-denken@pt.rwth-aachen.de**. There is the possibility of a double-blind peer review. If you are interested, please let us know by submitting the abstract including suggestions for two reviewers. Please address any questions directly to the editorial team.

Time frame:

- Abstracts must be submitted no later than May 9, 2025.
- Acceptance of papers will be announced by June 6, 2025.
- A authors' workshop will be held for the selected authors on Thursday, 24 July or Friday, 25 July, 9-12 a.m. (online)
- Full papers must be submitted by September 30, 2025.
- Authors will receive initial feedback in the fall of 2025.
- The editorial revisions, layout, and proofreading will take place in winter 2025/26.
- Publication is planned for spring 2026.

We would like to share some requirements for the manuscripts in advance. Contributions to pnd 1/2026 edition should:

- Not exceed 40,000 characters nor go below a minimum of 12,000 characters (including spaces);
- be written in English or German;
- include references such as scientific sources, or supplementary information and critical reflection in the case of field reports;
- include visual material such as pictures or diagrams in good quality and legibility;
- contain an abstract of about 1,000 characters (including spaces);
- include short biographies of the authors of no more than 300 characters (including spaces).

Detailed author guidelines will be sent with the notification of accepted submissions.

Publisher and Editor

The Chair of Planning Theory and Urban Development at RWTH Aachen University publishes the journal **pnd – rethinking planning**.

This issue 01/2026 is published and edited by Alice Herlé, Simon Hein and Agnes Förster.

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