

# Why are so many passive houses in Austria?

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## Abstract

In Austria, the first passive house was built in 1996. Since then the market for passive houses has rapidly increased. Statistics show that there were more than 7,000 buildings with about 20,000 passive house residents at the end of 2009 – more per capita than in any other country of the world. Meanwhile, the passive house standard is even considered to be made obligatory for new buildings and increasingly serves as a guiding vision for ambitious refurbishment projects.

The presentation draws on a qualitative case study to analyse the development and dissemination of passive houses in Austria by focussing on the role of intermediaries. Empirically, the paper is based on qualitative interviews with representatives of relevant organisations as well as the analysis of various documentary sources.

The case study shows that new types of buildings, such as ‘passive houses’, have given rise to new actors and organisations to organise integrative modes of planning, to facilitate social learning processes, to set standards and market the passive house concept, to certify components, to transfer knowledge to professionals, to assist consumers in choosing architects, installers and technologies or to organise participation processes. New interest organisations mediate between producers and the policy level, energy agencies act as system builders to transfer these new technologies and practices into the mainstream building sectors, etc. Intermediation processes fulfilled by a broad range of organisations turned out to be of crucial importance for the coordination and shaping of the socio-technical system. The evolution and growth of new socio-technical systems and practices such as the passive house is characterised by a typical succession of changing intermediation requirements that can be met by a succession of different intermediary organisations with a changing focus of activity.