



REDUCING
HOUSING
INEQUALITIES

Report on the Policy Labs #1

ReHousIn Deliverable 7.1

April 2025

Deliverable No.	D7.1
Document title	Report on the Policy Labs #1
Cite as	<i>Report on the Policy Labs #1 (2025) - Deliverable 7.1.</i> ReHousIn: Contextualized pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the green and digital transition
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Submission date	2025-04-30
Work package	WP 7: Stakeholder Involvement & Policy recommendations
Project title	ReHousIn: Contextualized pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the green and digital transition.
Grant Agreement No.	101132540
Coordinator	Metropolitan Research Institute (MRI)

This document has been prepared in the framework of the European project [ReHousIn](#) – “Contextualized pathways to reduce housing inequalities in the green and digital transition”.

The ReHousIn project aims to spark innovative policy solutions towards inclusionary and quality housing. To achieve this, it investigates the complex relationship between green transition initiatives and housing inequalities in European urban and rural contexts, and develops innovative policy recommendations for better and context-sensitive integration between environmentally sustainable interventions and socially inclusive housing.

This project is co-funded by the European Union. The UCL’s work on this project is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government’s Horizon Europe funding guarantee. The ETH work on this project is funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) under the Swiss government’s Horizon Europe funding guarantee.

Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, European Research Executive Agency (REA) and other granting authorities. Neither the European Union nor the granting authorities can be held responsible for them.

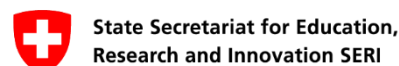


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1 Introduction

The current deliverable contains the individual reports of the ReHousIn research partners on their first Policy Labs that were implemented between 13th March 2025 and 25th April, 2025.

There were several goals the first Policy Labs intended to fulfil:

- Getting a feedback on the main findings and hypotheses set in the previously created deliverables D2.1, D3.1 and D4.1 about national and local green and housing policies, and their potential social inequality outcomes;
- Confronting the viewpoints of different stakeholders on the complex effects of the polycrisis (the simultaneous and interdependent climate and housing crises);
- Serving as a preparation activity for the fieldwork in Work package 5 by identifying key issues that have to be covered by interview questions in the local case study areas;
- Identifying and contacting the relevant stakeholders in order to create personal relations for establishing trust and laying down the foundation for future interviews;
- Lastly, the first Policy Lab aimed to capture a snapshot and “record” the current knowledge level and attitudes of the stakeholders in order to contrast it to the results of the second Policy Lab (in late 2026), when new research evidence, accumulated in the field work of ReHousIn, can be presented.

In order to meet all these goals, the first Policy Lab was organised after the related macro- and institutional level deliverables were completed (mid-February 2025) and before the field work in Work package 5 started (April/May 2025).

The methodology for and reporting about the labs were coordinated by the Metropolitan Research Institute based on a series of discussions within the ReHousIn consortium. Owing to these elaborated discussions, the local lab events followed a similar structure and used similar methodologies, thus, they served collecting similar materials for analysis in order to produce comparable research outcomes.

All the nine research partners (TUWien, SciencesPo, MRI, PoliMi, NMBU, UniLodz, UAB, ETHZ, and UCL) started the in-person Labs with a presentation on the first findings and hypotheses of the ReHousIn project. Then these findings were debated by the participants in groups. In some Labs these groups were created intentionally to have a mixed composition with different types of stakeholders, while in other Labs the groups were based on the three major themes of green policies of ReHousIn: energy efficiency of housing, nature-based interventions and urban densification.

Moreover, some partners (UniLodz, PoliMi) have chosen to organise not just a one-off, but multiple Policy Labs, as they wanted to mitigate the risk of the reluctance of national stakeholders being hesitant to travel outside of the main/capital city, while the representatives of smaller settlements/municipalities may not come to the main city. That is why the Policy Lab in Poland was organised in Łódź and Warsaw, while the Italian Lab was organised in Assisi and Milan. The British partner (UCL) has decided to split the Lab into two: starting with an

online event on the 19th of March to present the first findings of ReHousIn, while organising a face-to-face event on the 26th of March only for discussing the key research issues in a more intensive working environment.

The Policy Labs nicely revealed the main differences in knowledge level and attitudes of the stakeholders regarding the potential housing inequality impacts of green policies. In those countries where green interventions in urban areas are significant and public-led urban development projects are frequently implemented, the stakeholders seemed to be well aware of the potential inequality effects of green interventions, including unequal access to the benefits of interventions and unintended social consequences. On the other hand, in countries and cities where green interventions are not coupled with the pressing need for housing, thus their effect on the housing market is less relevant, the awareness level of stakeholders seemed to be much lower.

All Policy Labs could achieve valuable discussions on the role of several crucial factors in creating and mitigating the housing inequality consequences of green policies. Among others, the essential role of different housing systems' tenure structure was highlighted, but also the fact how housing is embedded into the local welfare system; e.g. public housing seems to suffer from the negative consequences the most in cities with marginal share of social housing, while public housing seems to be the most relevant policy tool against marginalisation in highly de-commodified housing markets.

Conflicting interests in multi-level and multi-sectoral governance structures were also emphasised as core frameworks that may lead to housing inequalities, simply due to the fragmented nature of planning and implementation of green and housing projects and the non-coordinated responsibilities of energy and housing policies.

The Policy Labs also revealed that the strongest narratives by the stakeholders are inspired by discourses of energy efficient renovation of the housing stock and, up to a certain extent, densification. The social consequences of nature-based interventions seemed to be much less recognised and thematised across the Policy Labs.

In the following, we share the national level reports on the Policy Labs. These contain an insight into the current policy debates on the social consequences and trade-offs of green policies as perceived by the key stakeholders across the ReHousIn partner countries. They follow the key analytical framework we designed for the Policy Labs, that is (1) the level of awareness of housing inequalities, (2) the attitudes towards green policies and inequality consequences, and (3) views on mitigation actions and options to address emerging housing inequalities. At the same time, we need to be cautious to use these reports for evidence-based comparison. In the Policy Labs, all participation stakeholders could represent and express their individual problems and their own perspectives on policy deficiencies. We understood that, for example, similar statements, like those on emerging affordability problems in newly densified urban areas, may have very different meanings depending on the fact, whether e.g. there is a compulsory share of affordable housing in new developments to be produced in a number of countries, while there is no such obligation in others. Thus, in the forthcoming phases of the project, beyond the analyses of the ongoing policy debates, the scientific comparison must be based on an objective assessment of the framework conditions as well.

1 Austria

1.1 General information

Date	25 April 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	One-site meeting at Technische Universität Wien Karlgasse 11, 1040 Wien, Seminarräume 1-3, Mezzanin
Number and types of participants	<p>16 representatives participated in the workshop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 representatives of social and private housing providers • a 1 representative of the tenant support service, • 4 representatives from national ministries (housing, social affairs, environment), • 4 representatives from regional administrations, • 2 independent experts (housing and building culture)

1.2 Agenda

09:30–10:00

Arrival & Coffee

10:00–10:30

Welcome and Presentation of the Policy Lab and ReHousIn by the project team

Introduction round with all participants

10:30–12:30

Two parallel Group Discussions with guiding questions on the topics of densification, energy renovations, and nature-based solutions

12:30–13:30

Lunch Snack

13:30–14:15

Plenary session with presentations from group discussions, questions and comments

14:15–14:30

Summary and outlook by the Project Team

1.3 Methodology

The Policy Lab employed a dialogue-oriented format to gather diverse perspectives on the intersection of housing affordability and climate and environmental policies in Austria. The methodological focus was on fostering structured discussions to explore challenges, impacts, and potential solutions related to urban densification, retrofitting, and nature-based solutions (NbS), with specific attention to social equity outcomes. The Policy Lab was organized as an in-person event upon invitation at the Technical University of Vienna. After an introductory session to frame the project objectives, outline the main challenges of climate policies and housing inequality, and present the first hypotheses, participants engaged in two parallel small group discussions. The two small groups (8 persons each) were set up to facilitate a dialogue amongst participants, guaranteeing that each speaker had enough time to elaborate their statements in depth. The participants were pre-assigned based on their expertise, institutional background and national/provincial/municipal level. The sessions were structured around guiding questions developed in advance by the project team. These discussions were followed by a plenary session to synthesise findings, discuss overarching challenges and gather proposals for identifying additional actors (for future interviews).

The Lab foresaw bringing together representatives from national, regional, and municipal authorities, along with actors from the public, limited-profit, and private housing sectors, civil society organisations, and academia. Efforts were made to ensure a diverse mix of expertise and institutional perspectives relevant to housing and climate policy. In the end, 16 participants attended the workshop; however, there was no representative from the small city of Gmunden due to a last-minute cancellation. Each small group discussion was guided by a facilitator from the project team and structured around predefined questions, which were sent out to participants prior to the workshop. The questions addressed how the tension between climate measures and access to affordable housing is perceived across governance levels, the challenges cities of different sizes face in balancing climate goals and housing affordability, and the key measures discussed, necessary or implemented to align these objectives. Discussions were documented through note-taking with sticky notes on a flip chart and audio-recorded.

Findings from the small group discussions were synthesized during the plenary session, captured in real-time by a project team member as rapporteur, where key insights were collected and structured according to three dimensions: (i) current challenges, (ii) specificities of these challenges according to scale and characteristics of small, medium and large cities, and (iii) effectiveness and limitations of current measures or recommendations for future measures. These insights will be used to inform a broader comparative analysis within the ReHousIn project and inform the qualitative interview phase.

In terms of the strength of the Policy Lab, the dialogue-oriented and cross-sectoral design allowed for a rich exchange of context-specific knowledge and practices. After the policy lab, participants commented that they appreciated the exchange across sectors and institutions in this setting.

In terms of limitations, the recruitment and invitation phase for the Policy Lab was affected by external political circumstances. At the national level, the Austrian government was in the

process of being formed following recent elections, and ministerial assignments and areas of responsibility had not yet been finalised. As a result, it was difficult to engage national-level public servants, mainly from climate policies, many of whom were unavailable or unable to commit to participation. At the regional level, the upcoming provincial elections in Vienna on 27 April also posed a challenge. Ongoing election campaigns limited the availability of relevant stakeholders and made it more difficult to secure commitments from potential participants from the municipal and regional administrations. Additionally, it was more difficult to get in contact with the medium and small municipalities and invite civil servants to travel to Vienna for the workshop.

Despite these constraints, the Policy Lab was able to bring together a broad and diverse group of participants, although representation from some public authorities (small municipality) remained more limited than originally intended.

1.4 Main starting/discussion points

Participants received the following guiding questions in the invitation (translated from German):

- How is the tension between densification, energy-efficient renovation, nature-based solutions and access to affordable housing perceived at the federal, state and municipal levels?
- What common or different challenges do large, medium-sized and small cities face when they want to achieve climate targets and secure affordable housing at the same time?
- What are the key measures being discussed to reconcile climate targets with the right to affordable housing at the federal, state and municipal levels?
- Which population groups are particularly affected by climate and environmental policy measures in the housing market – who benefits and who suffers?

As part of the introductory presentation by the project team, the following collection of hypotheses on impacts and challenges in implementation was presented to initiate subsequent discussions:

Impacts:

- Thermal renovations, decarbonization, and greening measures have socially unequal effects.
- The risk of rising rents varies across different housing market segments, with particular risks in privately or commercially rented older buildings.
- Densification through new construction increasingly poses the challenge of ensuring affordable housing for low-income groups.

Challenges in implementation:

- Insufficient or unclear coordination of political responsibilities and instruments between federal, state, and municipal levels.
- High bureaucratic hurdles for funding programs slow down renovations and decarbonization efforts.
- Construction costs (but also land prices) represent major challenges for renovations, decarbonization, and the provision of nature-based solutions.

1.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

1.1 Knowledge level

The participants demonstrated **strong and differentiated knowledge** regarding green policies, housing policies, and their complex interconnections. In the group discussions, knowledge about both technical/practical aspects (e.g., heating system transformations, data gaps, experience from renovation projects) and policy-focused but also broader systemic economic issues (e.g., financing challenges, funding mechanisms, EU regulation impacts and frameworks like the New European Bauhaus). Participants showed a **strong understanding of the trade-offs** between environmental goals and housing affordability, and much of the discussion centred around the question of how to implement energy and environmental policies within the current regulatory framework and who is paying or willing to pay in times of budget cuts?

1.5.1 Attitudes

In particular, the participants observed that renovations and energy upgrades often lead to higher rents and increased living costs, putting vulnerable groups at risk. Several participants noted that vulnerable tenants are often unable to benefit from energy savings because they cannot afford the upfront costs associated with "green" upgrades. Furthermore, it was emphasised that many tenants **resist heating system upgrades and thermal renovations** due to **fear of rent increases, but also due to construction site nuisance and invasion of privacy by craftsmen**.

A major theme was the integration of climate and social goals, and they repeatedly highlighted trade-offs between objectives like decarbonization and housing affordability. Most of the participants agreed on a framing that emphasised that green and social policies must be thought together, rather than sequentially or separately. Many discussed the need for integrated approaches rather than seeing green and social goals separately. Several participants stressed that narratives must shift: climate action is essential, not optional or "too expensive".

There was also a critical reflection on whether certain green measures (like mandatory heating system replacements) always make ecological and economic sense. Furthermore, participants noted that, for example, thermal insulation measures and heating system exchange measures

were competing measures in funding schemes, depending on trends or political focus at certain times, instead of using both as complementary measures. Some contradictory effects also emerge due to the regulatory framework of the Tenancy Law: In order to future renovations and decarbonization measures to take place in municipal housing estates, strategic vacancy of a large number of apartments is created.

1.5.2 Policies

To address the inequality effects of green transition policies, the participants identified several important policy approaches.

- First, discussions stressed the importance of combining object-based housing subsidies (targeted at buildings) with subject-based subsidies (targeted at tenants and homeowners) to ensure that costs do not fall disproportionately on low-income households. But also, more targeted subsidies and support, such as Wohnschirm Energie, are needed to directly alleviate energy costs for vulnerable groups.
- Second, simplifying funding access (considered as the most important tool within the Austrian context) and minimizing bureaucracy were discussed as crucial strategies. Flexible and pragmatic retrofitting solutions, which stressed that partial upgrades could make improvements more accessible. Legal frameworks (e.g., building code) and Tenancy law (MRG) are still major barriers that need stronger coordination. A **reform of the Tenancy Law** was mentioned to resolve the difficulty of balancing necessary investments with tenants' rights. Also, the lifting of rent control for privately rented pre-war housing after successful retrofit was suggested.
- Third, **improving the energy performance data** was highlighted as a prerequisite for accurately targeting the worst-performing buildings. Data is also missing on which heating systems are currently in use, e. g. in limited-profit and municipal housing estates. Better data on social needs and housing affordability to ensure that support measures actually reach inhabitants in need of support was also mentioned as an important data gap to be addressed.
- Fourth, a clear focus on **communication strategies with tenants and homeowners**, particularly about technical changes and costs, was seen as necessary. **Social acceptance among existing tenants and communities remains a major hurdle.**
- **Finally, this goes hand in hand with the demand for capacity building in city administrations in small and medium cities to apply communication strategies.** These municipalities specifically need support in rolling out consultations for tenants and homeowners. They also often face challenges with capacities (financial and time) to design and implement effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategies.

1.5.3 Any other relevant outcomes

Participants agreed that multi-level governance strongly shapes how inequalities emerge and are managed in Austria, based on the federalist set-up of the country. Nearly all participants emphasised that multi-level governance plays a pivotal but problematic role. Fragmented

responsibilities between the municipal, regional and federal levels slow down and complicate interventions, but also the adoption of EU policies. For instance, while EU directives set important benchmarks and goals (such as the obligation to renovate the worst-performing 20% of buildings), the national, but even more the regional and local levels are responsible for implementation, leading to a complex coordination challenge with a tendency to hand problems from one level to another.

Other participants emphasised that smaller municipalities often lack the necessary capacities, which could result in crucial challenges to implement retrofits, nature-based solutions and densification, resulting in deepened territorial inequalities. Financial pressures often make it difficult for low-income building owners or municipalities to prioritise climate-resilient solutions. At the same time, a shortage in professional labour and certified businesses to carry out the construction work was mentioned, as public institutions in cities that manage large-scale social housing estates need to align with EU competition regulations and national procurement procedures.

Furthermore, some participants noted that while densification can help reduce land use and protect green spaces, it often leads to conflicts with efforts to create or maintain urban greenery. Participants acknowledged that there are inevitable trade-offs between building more housing, keeping cities cool and green, and maintaining quality of life. Nevertheless, the urgent need for urban greening, especially because of the increasing number of tropical nights and urban heat stress, has been highlighted. However, some speakers noted that building regulations and heritage protections often hinder both the implementation of densification and NbS measures like green facades or roof gardens. In addition, some participants indicate that in smaller towns, the demand for ecological building solutions (such as timber construction or green roofs) remains very low, due to traditional building preferences and limited awareness.

Furthermore, densification projects often require complex negotiations among existing owners and tenants, and disagreements can delay or block projects. Furthermore, financial feasibility is an issue: profits needed from new units (especially attic conversions) are essential to finance the upgrading of the old structures, but building restrictions (e.g., only one additional floor allowed) undermine this. At the same time, new financial schemes beyond current financing models were mentioned as necessary to deal with large-scale housing estate retrofitting and decarbonization projects.

The conversation suggests that WP5 of the project should analyse social acceptance, cost impacts, and especially governance gaps. The latter focuses on how capacity constraints at the local level affect the actual delivery of green housing initiatives. Moreover, participants stressed the importance of framing strategies and how public acceptance or resistance can shape green transition success.

Beneficiaries and negatively affected groups

According to the participants, middle- and higher-income households are often the primary beneficiaries, as they can afford the new rents and move into upgraded buildings. It has been also commented that beneficiaries are residents of newly built or comprehensively renovated social and non-profit housing, where energy efficiency standards are high. People living there enjoy lower energy costs, better indoor climate conditions, and often subsidised rents.

From a funding and tenure perspective, large public housing providers and better-resourced municipalities also benefit from accessing multiple funding programs, although the scope of the measures required is also considerably greater. Additionally, middle-income homeowners in low-density buildings like semi-detached houses or single-family houses benefit more from funding schemes for decarbonization and thermal insulation, because renovation decisions do not have to be negotiated with building co-owners.

Groups that are most negatively affected have been characterised as **low-income households in older, poorly renovated buildings**, particularly in private rental markets across all city sizes, by the participants. In relation to low-income tenants, it has been highlighted that particularly long-term residents (Altmierter) with relatively low rents are disproportionately affected, facing disproportionate rent increases upon retrofit and heating system exchanges.

It has been, furthermore, emphasised during the discussions that persons with migrant backgrounds, single parents, and unemployed or precariously employed individuals are especially vulnerable to energy poverty and rising housing and energy prices. Additionally, the immigration status-related restrictions and citizenship status were mentioned, which further limit access to subsidised green housing.

In rural areas, low-income homeowners and private landlords often struggle with the financial burden of meeting new efficiency standards, further deepening spatial inequalities. In this sense, it was also mentioned that older generations are more negatively affected than younger generations due to their more restricted access to bank loans for renovations.

1.6 Resources shared

The presentation of the introduction, including a project presentation and preliminary results, was shared among the participants. This also included links to already published deliverable D2.1.

2 France

2.1 General information

Date	25-03-25
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	SciencesPo, place St. Thomas 1, Paris, 75007
Moderators, organizers	Marco Cremaschi, Antoine Guironnet, Federica Rotondo, Tommaso Vitale
Number and types of participants	<p>26 participants, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policymakers: Minister of Ecological Transition and of Planning and Devolution (also responsible for Housing), City of Paris (planning, NBS) • National agencies: Agence nationale pour l'amélioration de l'habitat (ANAH) • Social housing: Fédération des offices publics de l'habitat (FOPH), L'Union Sociale pour l'Habitat (USH) • Experts: Institut de la Transition Foncière, Institut des Hautes Etudes pour l'Action dans le Logement (IDHEAL), GIP Europe des projets architecturaux et urbains (EPAU), Observatoire Immobilier Durable, Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture (PUCA), École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) • Advocacy groups on housing needs: Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés (ex- Fondation Abbé Pierre, FAP)

2.2 Agenda

Policy Lab #1 mostly consisted in a focus group organized in two main sessions, which are detailed below.

The introduction consisted in the presentation of:

- The ReHousIn research program: main topics, research questions, and methods, particularly comparative issues;
- Preliminary results from WP4 regarding housing systems and policies in France, and WP3 regarding environmental and energy policies (EEPs), i.e. housing retrofit, nature-based solutions, and densification;
- The main aims of the Policy Lab, and key topics and questions asked for each session.

The agenda for the event is summarized in the table below:

Time	Activity
9:00-9:30	General introduction, and quick presentation of participants
9:30-11:00	Session 1: Synergies and trade-offs between environmental and social goals
11:00-11:15	Coffee break
11:15-12:45	Session 2: Cooperation and frictions in multilevel horizontal and vertical governance, and territorial variations
12:45-13:15	Wrap-up conclusion
13:15-14:15	Lunch

2.3 Methodology

The Policy Lab #1 was conducted as a focus group, in order to collect worldviews from different stakeholders on key issues, with Sciences Po team members acting as moderators. Key steps included:

- Recruiting participants;
- Designing the agenda, including the choice to organize 2 sessions in plenary mode to maximize stakeholder's engagement and ensure the confrontation of different worldviews;
- Preparing a synthesis of reports WP2-3-4 in an accessible language and send it to participants in advance, to kick-start discussions by collecting feedback;
- Animating the event, through a short introduction that summarized WP2-3-4 objectives, key results from the synthesis, and main discussion points, and through acting as moderator (i.e. time keeping, note taking) to ensure the widest participation possible on the largest number of topics
- Sharing informal conversations around coffee break and lunch, to gather additional information and possible contacts for interviews.

In terms of recruitment and communication, the main issue was the involvement of representatives from localities. In the case of Paris (metropolitan capital), despite different entry points and the network for the Urban School of Sciences Po, it proved to be difficult to involve the municipal administration. One hypothesis is that this may be due to the upcoming municipal elections in March 2026, for which the different political factions are already preparing. Additionally, whereas we had secured expertise from leading local planning institutions, such as the Atelier parisien d'urbanisme (APUR) and Institut Paris Region IPR), their representatives cancelled their participation at the last moment. Nevertheless, the Policy Lab benefited from the participation of people with a strong experience on relevant topics in the City of Paris.

As for the other cases (mid-size city: Orléans, rural area: Sens), several attempts were made with the mayors and the administration to enroll their representatives in the event. Their absence was compensated by the involvement of policymakers and expertise with a nationwide experience, i.e. across different territories beyond Paris. Representatives from these cases also showed interest in the research, which will help for the next phases of the fieldwork.

2.4 Main starting/discussion points

As an introduction, the Sciences Po team commented upon one of the core challenges in housing policy today, i.e. the balance between **environmental objectives** (such as reducing energy consumption and promoting sustainable urban planning) and **social imperatives** (ensuring housing affordability and protecting vulnerable populations).

The introduction also explored the effective **coordination between different levels of governance**—national governments, the European Union, and local authorities; how **financial, health, and energy crises** have influenced housing and environmental policies; and the effects of territorial **location**. The Horizon research team focuses on three policy domains: housing retrofitting, densification, and nature-based solutions.

In that context, the Lab was asked to address two key questions and sub-questions, addressed through two thematic sessions:

Session 1: Synergies and trade-offs between environmental and social goals

- 1) How do housing retrofitting, urban densification, and nature-based solutions impact housing supply and social inequalities?
 - 1a: What roles do the French State and the European Union play in the development and implementation of housing retrofitting, urban densification, and nature-based solutions policies?
 - 1b: What are the effects of different crises (the 2008 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, etc.) on housing and/or ecological transition policies, and their ability to reconcile different challenges?

Session 2: Cooperation and frictions in multilevel horizontal and vertical governance, and territorial variations

- 2) How do different levels of governance (State, European Union, local authorities) interact in shaping and implementing housing and ecological transition policies, and how do these dynamics vary across metropolitan, mid-sized, and rural areas?
 - 2a: Which territories, policies, or projects related to housing affordability and ecological transition initiatives have been significant in recent decades?
 - 2b: Beyond prices, what other mechanisms influence inequalities in access to housing depending on territorial contexts (metropolitan, medium-sized city, rural)?

2.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

What level of knowledge did participants have on green and housing policies and their interconnection? (Knowledge level)

Participants had a great knowledge of either green or housing policies, with some of them specializing in some areas (e.g. housing retrofit, NBS). Many, if not most of them seemed to be aware of the interconnections and trade-offs, or at least of the social issues of some ecological transition policies such as housing retrofit. The debate was rich and multifaceted, surpassing initial expectations. It highlighted important political aspects, which were insightful. The focus shifted to multi-level frictions, particularly between mayors and the Senate, which remains relevant and thought-provoking. What emerged was not merely a debate on technical solutions like energy efficiency measures or heating systems, but a deeper exploration of the political orientations, economic dynamics, and governance challenges that shape housing policies today.

How did the participants perceive the impact of green policies on housing inequalities? (Attitude)

In general, the discussions highlighted that the ecological transition in housing cannot be separated from political, economic, and institutional dynamics. A systemic approach and long-term strategies are essential to reconcile social and environmental challenges. The main ideas that infused the debate were:

- A specific focus on the social housing sector, which faces a dual constraint: increasing demand for affordable housing and growing ecological requirements (energy retrofitting, carbon footprint reduction). However, diminishing public funding forces the sector to rethink its economic strategies.
- While housing retrofitting policies and urban densification are crucial for reducing the carbon footprint of the housing sector, they must be adapted to territorial realities and accompanied by social measures to prevent exacerbating inequalities. Integrating environmental objectives into housing policies presents a significant challenge. Housing retrofitting is vital for improving building efficiency, but it involves substantial costs. Furthermore, protecting natural spaces and urban densification often conflict with the need to expand the supply of affordable housing.
- When assessing the impact of the ecological transition on housing, a distinction should be made between social housing and other forms of housing tenure. In addition to the private rental market, multiple property ownership should also be considered.
- The governance of social housing is marked by institutional fragmentation, impacting social housing provisions and the definition of access criteria, which vary depending on the territory.
- Decentralization in France has led to disparities between local authorities, and some decisions are hindered by diverging priorities among various levels of governance (the State, regions, and municipalities). This complexity reveals different starting conditions (e.g., in terms of exposure to climate risks) and impedes the implementation of coherent and effective policies.

What are the policies and approaches they identified to cope with the housing inequality effects? (Policy/Practice)

Several challenges and perspectives in the implementation of energy and environmental policies are highlighted:

- **Effect on low-income households:** although housing retrofitting policies aim to reduce energy consumption and costs, they require costly investments. Financing remains a barrier for the most modest property owners, especially in the private sector.
- **Anticipation of European directives:** National ecological transition policies are shaped by a dual set of directives stemming from both the European level and international frameworks. France has often led the way in terms of European regulations, with standards such as RT 2000 and recent debates on energy-inefficient housing.
- **Increased role of local authorities:** since the 2000s, local authorities have gained greater responsibility for energy retrofitting and tackling energy poverty, but financial constraints still limit them. As for NBS, the City of Paris claims to focus its main efforts in the most deprived areas, based on the geography of social housing (e.g. Chapelle neighborhood in the 18th district), as well as to diminish the impact of related works on public space for local populations.

Also, the Lab addressed a few examples of policies that extend far beyond initial expectations.

- Fight against urban sprawl and land-use sobriety, with measures to limit soil artificialization.
- Rehabilitation of rural town centers to counteract the depopulation of small municipalities, partly related to deindustrialisation and urban sprawl
- Local housing retrofitting initiatives, often more innovative than national policies.

Any other relevant outcomes, e.g. role of the multi-level governance in generating or handling the inequality consequences?

Turning to the governance issues, the discussion highlighted that the State, local authorities, and Europe have overlapping competencies that create a complex web of policies. In addition, horizontal governance issues and competing interests emerged at the local level.

- **The State** plays a key role in defining the regulatory framework and guiding ecological transition and housing policies, notably through financial programs like "MaPrimeRénov". However, its actions are constrained by budgetary austerity and the need for cooperation with local authorities.
- **In the case of Paris, the regional authority** does not address the relationship between housing and transport infrastructure in the context of densification policies, and the lack of regional coordination could exacerbate housing inequalities

- **Local authorities** play an increasing role in implementing policies, especially in housing retrofitting. However, they face a lack of implementation tools, economic resources, and fragmented competencies.
- **The European Union** strongly influences these policies by setting energy standards and financing certain programs, but implementation depends on member states and local specifics.

Besides, the multitude/mix of property owners and social landlords makes housing retrofitting processes more complicated. In Paris, the competition of interests between landowners, real estate developers, and municipalities regarding the use of former railway lands was also raised.

How will the outputs help you implement the field work in WP5?

The France Policy Lab highlighted the complexities of reconciling social and environmental goals within housing policies, emphasizing the critical role of multi-level governance in ensuring just and effective transitions. A couple of warnings may affect the research advancements: for instance, urban densification is often seen as a solution to curb urban sprawl and optimize the use of existing infrastructure. However, several participants expressed reservations:

- **Criticism of "densification"**: the term is often negatively perceived as an increase in concrete construction. The focus should be on land sobriety (sobriété foncière), reusing vacant homes and brownfields rather than massive new construction.
- **Limits of land sobriety**: The refunctioning or reuse of already urbanized areas or existing buildings does not necessarily guarantee quality housing, raising challenges in balancing land efficiency with livability.
- **French territorial fragmentation**: the fragmented urban planning responsibilities make it difficult to implement a coherent land-use policy that also integrates service infrastructures and mobility issues.
- **Densification's potential to exacerbate real estate tensions**: It can exclude low-income households from city centers.

Who are the primary beneficiaries of major housing-related green transition policies?

The answer is not direct and the situation is not clear cut. The acceptability and willingness to address housing affordability and ecological transition emerged as the key issue. Distinct processes may affect beneficiaries:

- **Political focus over technical aspects**: Technical solutions are framed by broader political, economic, and governance challenges shaping housing policies today.
- **Housing under structural constraints**: Ecological and social tensions are embedded in rigid financial and property models.
- **Implementation distortions**: Divergences between national legislation and local actions create inconsistencies.

- Predominance of the private market, at the expense of housing affordability, which is considered adversely by the “insiders”, i.e. owners of homes who have a built-in interest in upward market trends which are likely to boost their wealth
- Crisis of democratic governance: Fragmented competencies weaken institutions’ ability to propose equitable solutions.

Who has been most negatively affected by housing-related green transition policies?

The discussion highlights several key territorial dynamics and challenges in France that are negatively affected by ecological transition policies.

- **Urban sprawl:** expansion of peri-urbanization beyond the third ring of metropolitan cities, referred to as “mega peri-urbanization”
- **Coastal migration:** Settlement not only on the coast itself but also in the inland coastal areas, referred to as “retro-littoral” or “peri-littoral” areas;
- **Depopulation of northeastern France**, a phenomenon reflecting deep economic and social shifts.

Additionally, it was stressed that although there are governmental subsidies to help households pay for housing retrofitting, the cost of renovation still makes it very costly for low-income populations. Some participants also underlined that housing affordability is mostly an issue for “outsiders” of property ownership, but that many actors involved in housing policy and system are dependent upon price appreciation, starting with homeowners, and including diverse intermediaries (property agents, developers, etc.) who profit from such dynamics.

2.6 Resources shared

- Study on the structure of housing ownership, stressing inequalities: Insee (2021);
- Study on the restructuring of territorial dynamics linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, sponsored by GIP EPAU: “Urban Exodus” (2023);
- Study on net-zero land consumption and housing crisis: details;
- Study on housing demand and supply at the local level: IDHEAL;
- Webinar on regional Observatories on housing and land organised by the Minister of Ecological Transition and Planning: details;
- Several leads with key actors for interviews after the event.

3 Hungary

3.1 General information

Date	1 April 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	In person event, Budapest, MagNet Community Centre
Number and types of participants	25 people participated in the event, 3 people from state organisations, 10 people from research and academia, 6 people from municipalities, 2 people from development companies and 4 people from housing NGOs. All three case study locations were represented.

3.2 Agenda

The agenda, as was planned and implemented, was the following:

9.45-10.00: Registration

10.00-10.25: International examples on the housing inequality effects of green policies in European cities – Iván Tosics (MRI)

10.25-10.45: The Hungarian green policies and their housing consequences - Éva Gerőházi and Julianna Szabó (MRI)

10.45-11.15: Q & A session

11.15-11.30: Coffee break

11.30-12.45: Group work on the housing effect of green policies (three parallel groups)

12.45-13.00: Feedback and closing

13.00-tól: Buffet lunch

3.3 Methodology

The methodology was based on a mixture of plenary and breakout sessions. The plenary with the two introductory presentations aimed at familiarizing the audience with the interpretation of green policies and their predicted housing consequences. As terms like green gentrification or renoviction are not well known in the Hungarian context, it was important to provide a basic framework for the participants in the first presentation.

The second presentation by MRI summarized the relevant Hungarian policies with regard to housing regeneration, Nature based Solutions in urban areas and densification. It also described the potential housing inequality consequences and the possible public policy tools to cope with the situation. As the stakeholders came from different background, and the sectors in green policies are various in the project, providing the audience with the basic policy information was essential.

The aim of the breakout sessions was to challenge the hypotheses of MRI on housing inequality consequences of green policies and confront them with the field experience of the participants. The composition of the three groups were intentionally mixed containing stakeholders from different background, like state organisations, researchers, municipalities, NGOs and developers.

In order to remind the participants on the findings of the first year of the research, the hypotheses on housing inequality consequences of green policies, as were presented, were printed and shared in all three groups.

The representation rate turned to be higher than expected in the early phase of the organisation, however the state officials and representatives of development companies finally did not come in such a number as they registered. Still we were satisfied with the mixture of profiles being represented and also with the number of participants, as splitting them into three provided the proper environment for in-depth conversation.

On the other hand, the duration of the workshop was limited and the scope of ReHousIn was too wide to include all relevant topics. Nevertheless, we could not expect that the participants devote more than half a day from their time for the workshop, which is why a compromise between time-wise feasibility and the completeness of discussions had to be made.

3.4 Main starting/discussion points

The breakout sessions were organised around four major methodological questions:

- Which inequality mechanisms you consider the most relevant and why among the presented ones?
- How different these mechanisms may be in the different tenure types?
- How these potential inequality mechanisms are taken into consideration when green programmes are planned and implemented?
- What is the room of manoeuvre the state and municipalities have to influence the housing market consequences of green policies?

The inequality hypotheses that were challenges were the following:

In case of the energy efficient retrofitting of the housing stock:

- Housing quality: due to improper change of windows or due to improper behaviour the indoor air quality worsens.

- Value change: relative devaluation of non-renovated areas (according to statistical analysis, locality seems to be more important than energy efficiency state in setting the value of a property, in Budapest).
- Cost of living: financing the renovation might result in increase in condominium costs/rents/loan instalments, which exceeds the energy cost saved (mainly due to capped energy prices).

In case of Nature based Solutions:

- The prices of real estate increases around major NbS investments that provides an incentive to homeowners to sell their homes (windfall gain).
- The ones that cannot benefit from NbS solutions may experience a relative degradation of their housing and living quality.

In case of densification:

- Due to the new brownfield developments, that are highly priced, the (already very low) share of affordable housing decreases.
- The new housing complexes create homogeneous blocks for the upper-middle class that restructures the socio-spatial distribution of the city.

3.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

3.5.1 Knowledge level

In general we observed, that the housing inequality consequences of green investments were not very well known or considered before by the stakeholders. It was already well known, that large scale urban development projects (like the Corvin project in District 8 or Dózsaváros in Veszprém) that had a strong influence on the housing stock, public spaces and economic opportunities, had a gentrification impact, but this effect was typically not linked to green policies. The crowding out effect of vulnerable households can be experienced in Budapest, but also in Veszprém, just because of the push on the housing market, but it is not linked to green investments. Officially, the number of residents is decreasing even in these cities, but in reality, the demand is increasing.

In analysing the possible consequences piece by piece, there seemed not to have a field experience on the crowding out effect of contributing to the renovation costs or increasing the comfort level (thus the rent level) of public or private properties. Thus, the field experience did not reflect back the preliminary hypothesis (however, this is something, which is worth testing by data).

The importance of NbS factors in market based real estate development was validated by the participating development companies. Not necessarily the privatised green (inside the development area), but the environment around it, which is decisive. This neighbouring green area adds to the value (and price) of the properties.

3.5.2 Attitudes

It was emphasized by several stakeholders that it is a much bigger danger that vulnerable groups are left out of green policies than the social effect of green policies. It is more harmful not to act than to implement green policies.

Many stakeholders mentioned, that green policies in general are very weak in Hungary. Due to the conditionality criteria, Hungary is not receiving the funds from Recovery and Resilience Facility and the sources of Cohesion Policy are also limited. There are no subsidies for energy efficient retrofitting of multi-family buildings for a decade, and even for the preferred family house sector has a low-budget subsidy scheme. There is a need for a 3% renovation rate in the housing sector annually, while the reality is about one third of it from private sources. In the field of nature based solution the public sources are also limited. The EU funded green city projects resulted in minor upgrades, which might have a limited impact. According to the participants the major issue is that there are too few green projects that are statistically not relevant enough to measure their impacts.

It was also highlighted by many, that the change of value of properties in large urban areas are influenced by many factors (like the general – and informal – inflow to urban centres, the split of households, financialisation of housing, the perverse system of housing subsidies that pushes the demand side, large urban projects like new metro lines or new pedestrian streets). These factors have a great impact on prices, while green investments were considered as minor additions to these major factors but certainly not as fundamental ones.

3.5.3 Policies

The plenary presentations by MRI contained some ideas about potential policy tools, which were only partially discussed due to the time limits of the workshop. The suggestions were the following:

In case of energy efficiency:

- Concentrating on energy poor households (supporting their participation in the renovation process through the Social Climate Fund)
- Improving the efficiency of housing allowances (that hardly exist nowadays)
- Having public-private contracts with landlords to regulate the rent increase in case of obtaining renovation subsidies

In case of NbS interventions:

- Considering the introduction of value based property tax
- Preferring small scale NbS interventions against the large scale ones
- Preferring natural, eco-system based NbS interventions against “urban beautification”

In case of densification:

- Inclusionary spatial planning (specifying a minimum level of affordable housing in new developments)
- Applying innovative housing forms in new developments (like co-housing or land trusts)
- Providing much more public funds for the increase of public housing (which is currently about 2.5% of the housing stock)

As the stakeholders did not have strong experience with the housing inequality consequence of green policies, general policy tips against gentrification were mentioned. Staged interventions were revealed which help the market adapting slowly and avoid obtaining short term windfall gains. This was the experience from the Magdolna project so far (being a case study site in ReHousIn), but also with regard to staged energy retrofitting interventions in residential buildings.

As a feedback on policy tools drafted by MRI, some stakeholders highlighted that politics have failed several times in introducing value-based property taxes. The local attempts to demand at least 10% affordable housing in District 11 was also not successful, and the municipality finally had to buy the apartments instead.

All stakeholders agreed that more public funds would be necessary to build affordable housing blocks, but as of now, the state refuses to devote financial sources for this purpose, instead it provides the opportunity for public developers to build on brownfields without keeping the local building regulations (these are the so-called “outstanding investments”).

3.5.4 Any other relevant outcomes

- **The role of tenure** was discussed in details in the breakouts. The participants concluded, that in a super-ownership environment the mobility caused by the change of property values or costs is much slower than in Western-European urban environment. There is a much higher transaction cost of selling and buying properties than in case of the rental sector, thus owners do not do that promptly just because of a slight increase in housing costs. The private rental sector is predominantly made up of small private owners having dispersed properties in different condominiums. These private landlords tend not to participate in the decision making process of homeowners’ associations thus are not the engines rather the hinderers of the renovation processes. Local municipalities tend to be hinderers too, as they have their public rental units mostly also in condominiums, and due to their financial difficulties they tend to be also against the renovation process.
- **Multi-level governance:** There was an expectation from the stakeholders’ side that the state, the local municipalities and the private sector should work hand in hand to accelerate the green transition and handle the social consequences. However today

the state is in a battle with the most progressive municipalities, so instead of cooperation, competition is the reality.

- **Results helping the fieldwork:** The workshop helped us specify the case study project areas and called the possibility to investigate multiple projects both in Ajka and Veszprém – green investment and housing retrofitting are also relevant in these locations. The workshop also highlighted, that there is a need for gathering data based evidences, as housing inequality consequences were not yet analysed in these locations and the municipalities are eager to get proper information. For this more field interviews are needed (e.g. with property managers and real estate brokers) and social and real estate data have to be analysed.
- **Who are the primary beneficiaries of major housing-related green transition policies?** As was mentioned before, the stakeholders complained more about the lack of green policies than their consequences. However, the policies that were implemented at all might have different target groups: while energy efficient interventions, mainly in the 2000s, included a wide range of social groups, the densification process by new-built complexes included exclusively the upper-middle class.
- **Who has been most negatively affected by housing-related green transition policies?** There were no social groups explicitly mentioned as negatively affected by green policies. There were limited number of large scale urban rehabilitation interventions implemented by public actors (not specifically green interventions, but containing also some slight green elements) that resulted in the displacement of social tenants and mainly tenants without titles, who were the most negatively affected. Sadly enough, even these public interventions were not monitored properly, so there is no evidence on social movements, only case by case observations and anecdotes.

3.6 Resources shared

The workshop was based on two introductory presentations by MRI summarizing the findings of D3.1 and the international examples that inspired the elaboration of the ReHousIn project.

4 Italy

4.1 General information

Date	4 and 11 April 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	Two in-person events: A) on April 4th in Assisi (Assisi Town Hall, Digi-Pass offices), B) on 11th April in Milano (Politecnico di Milano).
Number and types of participants	<p>A total of 43 people were involved in the Policy Lab A and B:</p> <p>A) On April 4th, 16 people: 6 persons from research and academia, 5 from the Regional public housing company, 1 from a housing cooperative, 1 person from the Assisi municipality, 1 from a tenant union, 1 from an environmental NGO, and 1 practitioner (architect).</p> <p>B) On April 11th, 27 people: 4 persons from research and academia, 2 persons from Region Lombardia, 1 person from the Lombardia Regional public housing company, 2 persons from the Emilia Romagna public housing company, 2 persons from the municipality of Milano, 4 persons from the municipality of Reggio Emilia, 4 persons from housing cooperatives, 1 person from a Bank Foundation, 2 practicing architects, 1 real estate manager, 1 metropolitan park manager, 1 housing consultant, 1 representative of the local governments' association, 1 representative of a national committee on green public spaces.</p> <p><i>Two staff from the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (Politecnico di Milano) in charge of reporting the Project, attended the introductory session of the Policy Lab.</i></p>

4.2 Agenda

In both cases, the agenda was programmed and implemented as follows:

- 09.30 Welcome and coffee
- 10.00 Presentation: The Rehousin project
- 10.30 Questions and introduction to the discussion
- 10.45 Group work and discussion
- 12.30 Restitution in plenary
- 13.00 Light lunch

4.3 Methodology

The methodology of the policy lab included a brief presentation of the project by the research team of DASTU, Politecnico di Milano (Massimo Bricocoli, Marco Peverini, Constanze Wolfgring), aimed at clarifying the objectives, research questions, methods, and case studies of Rehousin, tailored to the Italian context. We considered it crucial to ensure that all participants were "on the same page" regarding the overall Rehousin framework and types of policies and implications we aim to investigate. At the same time, a key objective was to begin establishing relationships between the research team and the local stakeholders, hoping that this will facilitate the discussion as well as further engagement and enhance responsiveness in future encounters.

Given our intention to establish an unbiased framework for discussion and avoid leading questions that would compromise the answers, we broke down Rehousin's research interests into a set of very open questions (see below), addressing both the positive and negative implications of ecological transition policies and programmes.

Participants were divided into equally sized groups (2 in Policy Lab A, 3 in Policy Lab B), each guided by two members of the research team (Lorenzo Caresana, Marcel Vazquez and an extra colleague, Carla Baldissera, supported the reporting of the discussions). The subdivision was based on pragmatic considerations, believing that smaller groups allow for both greater depth and efficiency in the discussion, allowing more time for each participant to express their views. Group composition was arranged to avoid placing participants who were already familiar with one another in the same group, while also ensuring to represent different thematic focuses roles, institutional affiliations, gender and age.

We emphasized that our primary interest as researchers was to learn from participants' expertise experiences, and therefore encouraged free and open responses, intervening only for the purpose of time management or to gently steer the conversation back on track when it drifted significantly from the topic. We were pleasantly surprised by the high response and attendance rate. With only four no-shows, almost everyone who had confirmed their participation in advance was present.

4.4 Main starting/discussion points

The working group discussions were organized along the following 4 questions:

- 1) What are the arguments and motivations behind "green" policies and projects (such as energy retrofitting of the building stock, urban regeneration and densification, nature-based design solutions)?
- 2) Looking at the implementation of policies and projects you are familiar with (please provide examples or refer explicitly to specific projects or policies): who benefits the most? What is the main challenge you have identified in their implementation? Which contexts, target groups, or segments of the population have benefited less or have been left out?
- 3) Can you name a particularly emblematic case of green policy, either as a good practice or in terms of critical issues? (this could be a project, a policy, or a personal/family

story) Who are the main actors involved in the policies and projects you are referring to?

- 4) What are the links—and implications—between green policies and housing policies or housing projects? How do actions in these two fields interact? What kinds of measures have been introduced to mitigate any shortcomings?

4.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

4.5.1 Knowledge level

Most of the participants shared a good and multifaceted knowledge of green and housing policies and projects and appreciated the perspective of a joint analysis that Rehousin is proposing. In the case of the stakeholders who have a stronger background in nature-based solutions and ecological transition policies the link to housing policies became evident and mediated by the role played by urban and land use planning.

Beside an awareness of climate emergency, common drivers for the implementation of green policies are pragmatically identified in a) European policies, plans and directives (Green Deal, Biodiversity strategy 2030, Nature Restoration Law), b) the push factor of public funding, fiscal benefits and EU recovery funds and c) the need to revitalise local economic sectors. Especially with reference to public housing, the raising energy costs and their impacts on households and public housing companies is seen as crucial. Nevertheless, relevant challenges persist: unequal access to benefits, risks of greenwashing, limited technical capacities, and regulatory fragmentation.

The discussions displayed a very complex understanding of the biases and controversial effects on housing inequalities that may be produced by green policies. Without a redistributive approach, environmental policies may deepen social and spatial inequalities rather than mitigate them.

One major common ground is the recognition that green policies create value, and this means an increase of quality of life as well as of real estate values. Therefore, it was widely acknowledged that the role of the public actor (either at the national, regional or local level) is crucial in the distribution of the benefits and in the reaching of the recipients.

A second relevant dimension acknowledged as relevant in producing controversial effects of green policies on housing inequalities is that recent green policies have been mainly implemented by programs and projects in a very short time frame at the expense of medium- and long-term planning. The pandemic and the post pandemic recovery funding are seen as factors that exacerbated some controversial effects of green policies, limiting their effectiveness and polarizing the recipients.

A third relevant dimension that was acknowledged concerns the way in which green policies have unequally benefitted their targets even at a large scale depending on: territorial factors (with regions in northern Italy benefitting much more than southern ones), institutional and organizational capabilities and readiness of the regional and local governments and actors in

responding to complex policy programs. Again, the role of the public in the setting of priorities and compensations is recognized as necessary and crucial.

Participants displayed and shared a good knowledge and awareness of the role of wide context-related factors that affect the three different case-study cities:

- Assisi facing the constraints in integrating green technologies within the protected historic centre affected by the pressure of tourism on housing provision and the controversial implications of densification and retrofitting of single buildings in the extensive sprawled developments in the fertile plain,
- Reggio Emilia with long-term processes of post-industrial redevelopment matching new green-driven programs that challenge urban planning to integrate green and housing policies within the slow pace of urban planning tools,
- Milano where increasing real estate values and housing costs ask for reframing urban regeneration beyond a real estate-driven orientation to demolition/reconstruction and for controlling the rent and value increase produced by any green policy.

Moreover, in terms of knowledge, the policy lab has been recognized by many participants as a very valuable chance for sharing more specific and technical knowledge, understanding of interconnections (both among different fields of actions and of different policy actors), confrontation on the outcomes and policy perspectives. On the one hand, while the knowledge profile of the participants was remarkable, the need of pooling different perspectives and knowledges on a common ground – as defined by Rehousin - is seen as a major lack in the policy design process.

4.5.2 Attitudes

A clear polarisation in the unequal impacts that green policies have on beneficiaries as well as on their impact on housing inequalities has been repetitively noted.

The discussion of local experiences related to the implementation of green policies and projects - particularly those focused on energy efficiency and densification/urban regeneration - reveals significant asymmetries in the distribution of benefits. The most impactful measures, such as the Superbonus 110% and building renovation programmes, have predominantly favoured areas with higher real estate values and actors with greater economic and informational capacity (homeowners, companies, and municipalities with strong design capabilities). Conversely, more vulnerable groups—especially tenants in public housing, low-income households, rural or inner areas, and small-scale operators—have been systematically excluded or marginalised. The fiscal design of many policy instruments— which requires significant tax capacity—has created a regressive incentive structure, rewarding those already in possession of capital or access to financial services. The recent elimination of the possibility of credit transfers to third parties (along with the elimination of the Superbonus 110% scheme) has exacerbated this inequality, removing one of the few mechanisms that could have facilitated participation by economically weaker groups.

The principal beneficiaries of green transition policies include:

- Middle- to high-income households, particularly owners of single-family homes, who were able to advance the required costs or access credit.
- Professionals and businesses in the construction and energy systems sectors, which benefitted from increased demand, despite persistent technical and training gaps;
- Financial institutions, which profited from managing the flows related to credit transfers, partially contributing to the emergence from the shadow economy.
- Urban areas with more favourable planning and regulatory frameworks, where project implementation was easier and where rent increase is more valuable.

The categories most often excluded or inadequately reached by green policies include:

- Residents of public housing: much of the stock is outdated, technically rigid, and subject to regulatory constraints.

- Managing authorities frequently lack the resources or technical expertise required to access funding or implement comprehensive projects.
- Low-income households and those experiencing energy poverty: excluded due to insufficient tax capacity and the absence of compensatory mechanisms (such as cost advances or administrative support).
- Small economic operators and self-employed professionals, often unable to manage the procedural complexity of the available measures.
- Inner and rural areas, penalised by low infrastructural density and persistent dependence on inadequate public transportation systems, which intensify the cost (and ecological) burden of mandatory travel.
- Essential public services, such as recreational and sports facilities (e.g., municipal swimming pools), which have been severely impacted by rising energy costs, thus reducing accessibility for low-income populations.

Economic barriers intersect with informational, administrative, and cultural obstacles: many citizens are unaware of available measures or choose not to pursue them due to bureaucratic complexity, low institutional trust, or a lack of technical support. Compounding this is the shortage of qualified technical staff within local administrations, which limits their capacity to design and manage integrated interventions.

4.5.3 Policies

The comparative analysis of local experiences highlights several strategic directions for ensuring that public policies aimed at ecological transition also contribute to mitigating housing inequalities:

- Adaptive governance and institutional cooperation, aimed at overcoming policy fragmentation and enabling medium- to long-term strategies.
- Long-term planning and systemic vision: the need to move beyond short-term impact logics in favour of long-term programming focused on community well-being, with the capacity to measure and govern social and territorial effects.
- Centralised policy guidelines combined with context-sensitive and differentiated interventions, capable of recognising the diversity of local conditions and needs.
- Increased investment in public residential assets, including large-scale maintenance and energy retrofitting, not limited to ad hoc programmes but incorporated into broader and sustained frameworks.
- Urban planning tools to regulate and capture value increases derived from Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) interventions, ensuring that environmental improvements do not exacerbate socio-spatial disparities.
- Recalibration of urban planning instruments, enabling more agile responses to the demands of sustainable transformation and the environmental upgrading of residential assets.
- Functional integration of environmental sustainability and social inclusion, linking public incentives to collective and public uses of buildings and developing hybrid mechanisms that combine environmental taxation with urban policy measures.
- Support measures for access to green policy instruments, including dedicated technical assistance and user support services (e.g., "Energy Desks" offering technical and informational guidance for energy efficiency upgrades).
- Systematic enhancement of building reuse, promoting the environmentally low-impact and socially accessible reactivation of existing building stock, particularly by small-scale actors and vulnerable populations.
- Strengthening public housing provision and multi-level governance: only through the availability of consistent European funding and the integration of environmental and housing policies can structural interventions in public residential buildings be realised. These may include complex operations such as demolition and reconstruction, with potential effects on urban densification and functional reconfiguration.

4.5.4 Any other relevant outcomes

The discussion and comparison of experiences allowed to envision a set of forward-looking themes of great relevance, both for the development of fieldwork and, more broadly, to foster continuous engagement among participants. This process reflects a shared need to maintain dialogue and ensure ongoing updates on the research progress. The diversity of professional roles and backgrounds within the groups, combined with the richness of the exchange,

highlighted the importance of sustaining connections with participants beyond the formal schedule and work packages of the ReHousIn project.

Below are key issues that emerged and may guide (or accompany) the next phases of the research:

Structural Challenges in Public Housing. In a southern European context where the stock of public housing is highly residual and public investment remains extremely limited, the existing assets are largely obsolete - marked by deficiencies in accessibility, spatial flexibility, and energy performance. In a time of policies focused on ad hoc frontline interventions for the green transition, the lack of ordinary maintenance and basic interventions becomes a paradox. Despite evident housing demand, many dwellings remain unoccupied due to structural inadequacy or lack of funding for renovation. While dedicated programmes for energy efficiency are active, it is essential that adequate funding be made available to ensure decent housing standards across the entire public stock.

Weak Integration of Energy and Sustainable Mobility Policies. The limited coordination between energy policies and sustainable mobility strategies has led to contradictory outcomes, with unintended environmental and socio-economic impacts. In low-density areas or regions with underdeveloped public services, energy efficiency investments—often involving increased building volumes and localized densification - have not led to meaningful reductions in household energy expenses, as these are offset by high economic (and environmental) costs associated with private car mobility.

Structural Gaps and Lack of Integrated Governance. Umbria is affected by critical socio-demographic trends, including peripheralisation, population ageing, and youth outmigration (over 20,000 young people aged 19–32 have left in the past decade). These dynamics place increasing pressure on both the housing system and environmental resources, calling for a coordinated territorial vision. However, a regional strategy that effectively links urban planning, social housing, and ecological transition is currently lacking.

Latent Opportunities: 'Short Institutional Distance' and Local Best Practices. In contrast to the aforementioned governance deficits, some local experiences demonstrate synergies between housing and environmental policies, facilitated by the region's relatively 'short institutional distance.' This proximity enables effective collaboration between local governments and territorial actors. For example, the regional public housing authority has, in some cases, successfully integrated energy retrofitting, housing accessibility, and urban regeneration through coordination with municipalities and the Region.

The absence of formal coordination platforms involving local authorities, housing agencies, the Region, and third-sector stakeholders limits the emergence of shared action frameworks. Current interventions are often siloed and disconnected, hindering the development of cross-sectoral strategies capable of delivering multiplier effects. The policy lab (i.e. in Assisi) emerged as a valuable context promoted by an academic institution to foster confrontation and exchange among local policy actors.

Urban and land use planning play a pivotal role in linking green policies with their effects on housing inequalities, as planning tools define and allocate value and development rights across territories. In this regard, it is essential to monitor the impact of new legislative frameworks - such as Emilia-Romagna's 2017 Regional Law - or local applications of planning tools, like in the case of the City of Milan, which pave the way for urban regeneration and densification processes with significant implications for housing provision.

4.6 Resources shared

While prior the Policy Lab we had sent a presentation of the ReHousIn project and shared the link to the website, in the opening of the meeting we provided a brief powerpoint presentation of the project, aimed at clarifying the objectives, research questions, methods, and case studies of Rehousin, tailored to the Italian context.

5 Norway

5.1 General information

Date	1 April 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	In person event, Oslo, Kulturhuset
Number and types of participants	16 people participated in the event, 9 people from research and academia, 3 people from municipalities, 3 people from NGOS and associations, 1 person from a development company.

5.2 Agenda

The agenda, as was implemented, was the following:

9:30-10

Welcome and presentation of ReHousIn and the Policy Lab – Roberta Cucca, NMBU

10:00 – 11:30

Group discussions

11:30 – 12.15

Lunch break

12.15-12.30

Plenary Discussion

12:30-13:00

Presentation of European examples and findings from Norway – Rebecca Cavicchia, NMBU

5.3 Methodology

The Policy Lab was structured as a combination of presentations, group discussions, and a concluding plenary session. The event commenced with an introductory presentation that provided an overview of the ReHousIn project and outlined the objectives of the Policy Lab. We presented key insights from the academic literature to examine potential connections between green policies and housing inequalities, introducing concepts such as green gentrification and renoviction. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that these concepts were accessible to participants from outside academia.

Following the introduction, participants engaged in group discussions. In order to maintain an open and unbiased dialogue, we intentionally chose not to share preliminary findings from our earlier analysis in Norway. Our objective was to elicit participants' own perspectives, experiences, and insights without influencing them.

Participants were divided into three thematic groups: densification, retrofitting, and nature-based solutions. Each group brought together stakeholders with relevant expertise in the respective area and included at least one representative from the housing sector. The discussions aimed to identify key challenges that green policies pose for housing inequalities, assess existing policy instruments, and explore potential solutions.

Groups were composed of 5–6 stakeholders and 2 NMBU facilitators, which fostered in-depth discussions and ensured that all voices could be heard. While the number of attendees was slightly lower than anticipated—four fewer participants than previously registered—the format supported a productive and engaging exchange.

The plenary session brought together the main takeaways from each group, allowing for cross-group feedback and broader reflection. At the conclusion of the workshop, we presented key findings from the first year of ReHousIn research in Norway and reopened the floor for final plenary discussion.

We were very pleased with the high level of participation and the strong engagement demonstrated throughout the event. Notably, we welcomed representatives from all three case study municipalities, including participants who travelled from Stavanger and Sogndal to attend the workshop in Oslo. Despite the limited time available, the sessions facilitated meaningful and stimulating conversations across all three policy areas. These discussions will be further developed through a series of follow-up interviews. The workshop was well attended, and participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage with the research team and with one another.

5.4 Main starting/discussion points

The group discussions during the Policy Lab were structured around three overarching themes: urban densification, energy retrofitting, and nature-based solutions (NBS). Within each group, participants engaged with a set of guiding questions to identify challenges, assess current policies, and propose actionable solutions.

1. Identifying key challenges and opportunities

- How do participants perceive the main tensions and synergies between their assigned theme and housing inequalities?
- To what extent do these challenges vary across different urban contexts, such as Oslo, Stavanger, and Sogndal?
- What opportunities exist for aligning environmental goals with more equitable housing outcomes?

2. Reviewing existing measures and their impact

- What policies or initiatives are currently in place to address both environmental and housing-related issues?

- How effective are these measures in practice?
- What policy gaps or unintended consequences have been observed (e.g., rising housing costs, displacement, exclusion)?
- How do various governance levels (national, regional, local) interact in the implementation of these policies?

3. Proposing solutions and policy recommendations

- What new or revised measures could better integrate social equity into environmental planning?
- Who should be responsible for implementing these policies (e.g., national or local governments, private sector, civil society), and how should coordination be organized?
- Each group was asked to propose at least two actionable policy recommendations based on their discussion.

5.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

5.5.1 Knowledge level

Across the three thematic groups, participants showed a well-developed understanding of the tensions and synergies between green transition policies and housing inequalities. Many had prior experience dealing with these issues in their professional roles, and discussions reflected both critical insight and contextual awareness. In particular, the conversation moved beyond abstract principles to explore how environmental policies interact with specific local realities in Oslo, Stavanger, and Sogndal. Participants from smaller municipalities, for instance, highlighted how limited capacity, both in terms of funding and institutional resources, constrains the implementation of inclusive green policies. Meanwhile, those working in larger urban centres noted how market dynamics and land scarcity often exacerbate exclusion.

5.5.2 Attitudes

In the densification group, one of the central issues identified was the dominant role of private developers whose profit-driven agendas often conflict with goals related to affordability, inclusion, and sustainability. In many cities, weak regulation and enforcement allow these actors to shape urban growth with limited regard for broader public interests. Municipal planning authorities—especially in smaller cities—frequently lack the financial and institutional capacity to enforce plans or support affordable housing initiatives. Even when progressive policies are in place, implementation is hindered by limited resources and fragmented governance. Housing, transport, environmental, and social planning often operate in isolation, making it difficult to coordinate strategies across sectors and municipal boundaries.

At the regional level, coordination is particularly weak. While regional growth agreements exist, they often lack the authority or enforcement mechanisms to align policies across municipalities.

This results in inconsistent densification efforts and fragmented responses to housing needs, with each municipality acting in isolation rather than as part of a cohesive strategy.

Current densification practices were also critically examined. While densification can improve land use and reduce sprawl, when led by a small group of developers, it can contribute to gentrification and neighborhood homogenization. Without mechanisms to ensure affordability and social diversity, densification risks reinforcing existing inequalities.

Finally, participants emphasized the need to center planning on people rather than just buildings. Cases of vacant apartments and mismatched housing demand illustrate the disconnect between physical development and actual needs. Addressing this requires stronger coordination, better regulation, and inclusive, context-sensitive planning that prioritizes long-term social value over short-term gains.

The NBS group substantially focused on the case of Oslo. Participants discussed how greening strategies, while framed as universally beneficial, can generate or reinforce inequalities. For instance, the group raised concerns that access to high-quality green areas is unevenly distributed, often favouring wealthier districts. In Oslo, areas with strong environmental protection, such as neighborhoods along the river corridors, were seen as more desirable but also more exclusive. Participants pointed out that those living near—but not directly benefiting from—green improvements reported lower satisfaction in annual climate surveys, suggesting spatial inequalities in green access.

Volunteerism (*dugnad*), which underpins much of the maintenance of semi-public green areas in Norway, was also criticised. While rooted in strong cultural traditions, this model assumes that all residents have the time and resources to contribute equally—an assumption that can disadvantage elderly people, migrants, single parents, and those with limited availability.

Another tension discussed was the role of green spaces in processes of commercialisation and gentrification. Events and festivals taking over public green areas were perceived as catering to specific social groups, contributing to exclusion and, in some cases, noise pollution. Moreover, investments in green amenities—without parallel measures to ensure affordability or equitable access—can fuel housing demand and lead to rising rents or property prices. This phenomenon, often referred to as "green gentrification," was viewed by some participants as a real, though under-recognised, dynamic in Norwegian cities.

Additionally, the group raised concerns about the accessibility of green infrastructure for vulnerable groups. Finally, participants noted that green projects often focus on visible and symbolic improvements, rather than deeper systemic issues such as how resources are sourced or how maintenance is financed. There was a shared concern that environmental planning can become a means of branding or beautification rather than a pathway to social inclusion.

The retrofitting group raised significant concerns about the fragmented and inequitable nature of current energy retrofitting efforts in Norway. Participants pointed to how retrofitting initiatives often reflect local ad-hoc priorities rather than a coordinated national strategy. This fragmented approach limits their overall impact, particularly in areas with limited institutional or financial capacity.

There was strong emphasis on the social dimension of energy retrofitting. Many housing cooperatives struggle to secure the consensus needed to launch upgrades, due to diverging interests across age groups and financial backgrounds. Older residents often resist taking on debt for renovations late in life, while younger residents with short-term housing horizons are hesitant to commit to long-term costs. The lack of trust in support schemes, alongside the complexity of application processes, further discourages action.

Concerns were also raised about the rental sector, where substandard housing conditions are widespread. Participants noted that around 45% of members in the Norwegian Tenants' Association report difficulties keeping their homes warm. Tenants, particularly in small-scale and informal rental arrangements, often lack both rights and leverage to demand improvements.

At a broader level, the group criticized the cultural and policy environment that reinforces high energy consumption—framed by cheap electricity, the “Norgespris¹,” and misaligned energy ratings that reward certain technologies (e.g., district heating) without ensuring actual reductions in energy use. This context undermines the motivations to retrofit and contributes to social and environmental inefficiencies.

5.5.3 Policies

Densification Group: Participants noted that current densification practices often align poorly with social equity goals. While densification is promoted as a sustainable growth strategy, its implementation frequently leads to homogenous, high-end developments that cater to affluent residents. In Oslo, the overwhelming influence of a small group of large developers was identified as a key structural issue. At the same time, participants from Sogndal highlighted the lack of financial capacity to guide or implement densification strategies that include affordability safeguards.

Key proposals included:

- Expanding municipal landownership and leveraging public land for affordable housing.
- Implementing national regulations mandating inclusionary zoning in all major urban developments.
- Creating stronger regional governance mechanisms to coordinate land use and housing policy across municipal boundaries.

¹ A national scheme where everyone is offered electricity at a fixed price of 40 øre per kilowatt-hour excluding VAT. The scheme is adjusted once a year

NBS Group: The group highlighted both promising initiatives and persistent policy gaps. They discussed the positive role of area-based development plans and municipal projects like Oslo's urban tree-planting programme and ecological corridor planning, while also criticising the limitations of current legislation. For example, the Planning and Building Act was seen as outdated and poorly equipped to address emerging sustainability challenges. Participants also reflected on the role of public participation and how it can be broadened beyond consultation to meaningful co-creation of green spaces.

Key proposals included:

- Developing social impact tools to assess how NBS projects affect different groups, particularly marginalised populations.
- Promoting early-stage integration of landscape architects and community stakeholders in NBS design and implementation.

Retrofitting Group: The group identified multiple limitations in the current policy landscape. National support schemes like Enova² primarily reaches higher-income households. Their structure often excludes those who need support the most, due to co-financing requirements or bureaucratic hurdles.

Energy labeling systems were criticized as ineffective and misleading. Many buildings receive poor ratings by default (as a legal precaution). At the same time, most buildings can receive a better rating without undergoing actual upgrades, which can be misleading for buyers.

Another big limitation concerns the rental sector, which lacks enforceable standards for quality and energy performance. Public rental housing was reported to be in worse condition than private, despite large municipal revenues during the recent electricity crisis.

The groups also discussed how the EU Energy Efficiency Directive is widely misunderstood. In a country with a very high rate of homeowners, there is a fear that the EU Energy Efficiency Directive will force private homeowners to implement expensive retrofitting measures. The group discussed the need for both information about energy retrofitting and subsidies and support schemes to prevent energy upgrading from generating unintended consequences, like putting too big an economic strain on households with a normal income.

Despite these challenges, some promising practices were mentioned—such as Oslo's co-funding scheme which successfully increased renovation uptake by combining Enova support

² Established in 2001 under the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Enova offers grants aimed at reducing energy consumption and CO₂ emissions

with additional municipal subsidies. The scheme consisted of grants for energy saving measurements, 50% covered by Enova and 50% by the Municipality of Oslo.

Key proposals included:

- Develop a national retrofitting strategy: A long-term, centrally coordinated plan is needed to ensure coherent and equitable implementation across municipalities.
- Redesign support schemes: Subsidies should be means-tested, easily accessible, and predictable over time to increase trust and effectiveness.
- Introduce mandatory indoor climate standards for rental housing, aligned with forthcoming national standards (e.g., Standard Norge), and incorporate these into the Planning and Building Act.
- Strengthening tenant rights and the legal right to housing, enabling broader access to renovation benefits and stimulating investment in public and non-commercial housing.
- Reform ownership and incentive structures: Encourage the growth of a non-commercial rental sector, prohibit profit extraction from municipal housing, and shift housing away from being treated primarily as a financial asset.

5.5.4 Any other relevant outcomes

Discussions across all three thematic groups addressed broader structural challenges that go beyond individual policy areas, pointing to systemic limitations in how housing and environmental strategies are currently governed and implemented in Norway.

One recurring theme was the fragmentation of planning and governance frameworks. Participants noted that housing and environmental policies often operate in isolation from one another, both within and across governance levels. This lack of coordination hinders the development of integrated solutions and disproportionately affects smaller municipalities, which frequently lack the capacity—financial, institutional, and technical—to implement ambitious, equity-oriented green strategies.

The absence of a comprehensive national housing policy was identified as a major constraint. This gap contributes to inconsistent practices in densification, insufficient support for retrofitting, and uneven access to green amenities. In the densification group, participants described how private developers, often driven by short-term profit motives, dominate urban development processes with limited mechanisms to ensure affordability or inclusion. Similarly, the NBS group expressed concern that nature-based projects, while environmentally beneficial, risk reinforcing spatial inequalities when implemented without deliberate attention to equity.

The rental sector emerged as a shared point of concern, particularly in the retrofitting discussions. Despite the increasing number of tenants in Norway, there are few binding quality standards or incentive structures for landlords to upgrade poorly insulated or deteriorating

properties. Public rental housing was often described as being in worse condition than private stock, raising serious questions about the role and responsibilities of municipalities.

Participants across groups also questioned the effectiveness and fairness of existing policy instruments. Current support schemes for retrofitting, such as Enova grants, tend to favor higher-income households who have the means to co-finance improvements. Meanwhile, the Planning and Building Act was criticized for being outdated to address the intersecting goals of environmental sustainability and social equity. In the context of NBS, this was seen in the prioritization of visible, high-profile greening projects over systemic, equity-driven planning.

Finally, the overall sustainability of green initiatives was questioned. From “green” densification projects that lead to gentrification, to greening strategies used as tools for place branding, to energy efficiency policies that incentivize superficial improvements—participants pointed out the need for a shift toward more meaningful, context-sensitive, and redistributive approaches.

There was broad agreement that a socially just green transition requires rethinking how we govern housing and urban development. This includes strengthening regulatory frameworks, aligning environmental and social goals, ensuring access to well-targeted support schemes, and embedding housing as a right—rather than a commodity—within national policy priorities.

5.6 Resources shared

- Policy Lab invitation and concept note
- Presentations by Roberta Cucca and Rebecca Cavicchia
- National report on housing inequalities (D 2.1)

6 Poland

6.1 General information

Date	Part 1: 13th March 2025 Part 2: 10th April 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	In person events Part 1: Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Łódź Part 2: University of Warsaw Library, Warsaw
Moderators, organizers	Szymon Marcińczak Bartosz Bartosiewicz Agnieszka Ogrodowczyk Katarzyna Leśniewska-Napierała Tomasz Mikołajczyk
Number and types of participants	<p>Łódź: 33 people participated in the event, 5 organisers, 8 people from research and academia, 9 people from municipalities, 1 person from the region of Łódź, 2 people from construction companies and 8 representatives of NGOs.</p> <p>Warsaw: 23 people participated in the event, 5 organisers, 5 people from state organisations, 4 people from research and academia, 6 people from municipalities, 1 person from region, 1 person from construction companies and 1 person from housing NGOs.</p> <p>The institutions represented during the workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – City of Warsaw Office, – Real Estate Management Department in the City Centre District of the Capital City of Warsaw Warsaw, – Real Estate Management Office in the Śródmieście District of the Capital City of Warsaw, – City of Pabianice, – City of Radomsko, – Strategy Office of the City of Lodz Office, – Ministry of Development and Technology - Department of Housing, – Ministry of Development and Technology – Department of Real Estate, – Mazowieckie Voivodeship Marshal's Office – Department of Regional Development and European Funds, – Regional Planning Office of the Lodz Province.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pabianice Housing Cooperative – Radomsko Housing Cooperative – Social Housing Initiative (SIM Lodz) – Social Housing Association TBS Warszawa Południe – Polish Association of Developer Companies, Lodz Branch – Society of Polish Urban Planners - Lodz Branch – The City Is Ours – University of Lodz – Warsaw School of Economics – University of Warsaw <p>All three locations for the case study were represented.</p>
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6.2 Agenda

The agenda of both meetings, as planned and implemented, was the following:

9:30 - 10:00	Registration
10:00 – 10:15	Welcoming of participants – Marcin Wójcik – Dean of the Faculty of Geographical Sciences, University of Lodz
10:15 – 10:30	Presentation of the project objectives „ <i>ReHousIn - Contextualized pathways to reduce housing inequalities in the green and digital transition</i> ” – Szymon Marcińczak
10:30 – 11:45	Workshop " <i>Renewal, densification or greening? How to reduce housing inequalities?</i> " - conducted by Katarzyna Leśniewska-Napierała & Tomasz Mikołajczyk
11:45 – 12:15	Coffee break
12:15 – 13:15	Discussion – "How can national and local housing policies reduce social inequalities and provide affordable housing?" – moderator Agnieszka Ogrodowczyk
13:15 – 13:30	Summary of the meeting – Bartosz Bartosiewicz
13:30 – 14:00	Lunch

6.3 Methodology

Policy Lab#1 was divided into 2 meetings, which took place in Łódź and Warsaw. This is due to the geographical distance between the case studies selected for analysis. This solution allowed for the presence of many stakeholders who would not have decided to participate in the meeting due to the burdensome travel. The methodology was based on a mixture of plenary and breakout sessions. Both meetings were opened with an introductory presentation about the ReHousIn project, which outlined its main goals, description of the consortium, and the preliminary results of the research conducted so far.

In the second part of the meeting, the discussion was based on Report D3.1 and the participants were divided into smaller teams (4-6 persons) composed of representatives from various stakeholder groups. During 3 rounds of the discussion each team identified and prioritized the major challenges associated with the implementation of initiatives related to retrofitting, densification of urban development, and nature-based solutions (NBS). Subsequently, each group presented their findings, followed by a plenary discussion during which all participants had the opportunity to comment on and reflect on the conclusions of the other groups. Each round of discussions was preceded by a brief presentation explaining the key concepts (retrofitting, densification of urban development, and NBS).

The final part of the meeting was dedicated to a discussion on *“How can national and local housing policies reduce social inequalities and provide affordable housing?”*. This part was opened with a presentation showing the key results of the D4.1 report. Subsequently, participants were invited to freely articulate their perspectives, presenting the official positions of the institutions they represented, particularly in relation to strategies aimed at reducing housing inequalities through the provision of affordable housing.

Attendance at both meetings was high, and only a few previously registered participants did not arrive due to unforeseen circumstances. The hardest part was encouraging representatives of developers and ministries to participate in the meeting. All invited participants either had an expertise related to housing, greening or development or were active stakeholders.

6.4 Main starting/discussion points

The workshop sessions were organised around 3 groups of major questions:

- What challenges might be encountered when implementing retrofitting projects? & What actions could facilitate the implementation of retrofitting projects?
- What challenges might be encountered when implementing densification projects? & What actions could facilitate the implementation of densification projects?
- What challenges might be encountered when implementing NBS projects? & What actions could facilitate the implementation of NBS projects?

The inequality hypotheses we provided for the workshop were the following:

- In case of the energy efficient retrofitting of the housing stock: the location of the property could remain a stronger determinant of market value than its energy efficiency status.
- In case of densification process: New residential developments associated with urban densification led to an increase in property prices, thereby heightening the risk of housing exclusion among existing residents with lower socioeconomic status.
- In case of NBS projects: The presence of nature-based solutions in a neighbourhood can contribute to an increase in property values, which, over the long term, can result in gentrification processes and the subsequent displacement of lower-income residents.

The discussion initially took place in small teams. Participants were provided with flipcharts and markers and wrote down their key findings using keywords. Each group then presented their observations, and the remaining participants were invited to comment on the presented keywords.

The final part of the Policy Lab focused on a discussion concerning the relationship between national and local housing systems and their capacities to deliver affordable housing. The topics discussed included, among others: the impact of crises and macro-trends on the capacity of national and local housing systems to provide affordable housing; synergies and conflicts between national and local housing systems in the context of affordable housing; as well as the main obstacles and key enabling factors for the production of affordable housing within national and local housing systems.

6.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

6.5.1 Knowledge level

Participants in the PolicyLab#1 meeting had varying levels of knowledge on green and housing policies and their interconnection. The lack of understanding of the connections among some stakeholder groups became apparent already at the invitation stage. The organizers were asked to hold talks to clarify the topics of the meeting.

Representatives of ministries, and regional and local authorities generally had a solid understanding of the policies from a governmental and implementation perspective. NGOs Academics were well-versed in the theoretical and research aspects of green and housing policies, including their environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Developers and architects, on the other hand, were more focused on the practical application of these policies in housing projects, with a strong emphasis on the integration of green solutions in construction and urban development. Overall, the knowledge was diverse, with each group bringing a different perspective to the discussion.

6.5.2 Attitudes

Participants generally recognized that green policies have the potential to both reduce and exacerbate housing inequalities in Poland. Representatives of local authorities emphasized that, if properly designed, green policies could improve the quality of life in disadvantaged areas. Scientists have highlighted that the benefits of green initiatives are often unevenly distributed, favouring higher-income groups. Developers pointed out that, while integrating green solutions increases the attractiveness of housing projects, it can also drive-up property prices. In general, participants agreed that, without careful planning and targeted social policies, green initiatives could unintentionally deepen existing housing inequalities.

Regarding green policy, participants emphasized that a major issue is the mental and educational barrier. In many cases, users do not identify with shared spaces and, as a result, do not take care of them. Common phenomena include devastation, lack of maintenance funds, and the conflict between greenery and parking or vice versa. Furthermore, in Poland, there is a lack of innovative approaches to introducing greenery in cities. One solution that could support this process would be the establishment of the role of a city gardener.

A serious barrier to the implementation of greenery in cities is the problem of ownership of inter-estate areas. It was also noted that the introduction of greenery can increase the value of properties in their immediate vicinity. Pocket parks or wonerfs were cited as examples.

The discussion emphasized the need to reflect on current and future demographic trends – questions about where people should actually live, taking into account the social structure and the availability of infrastructure. Balancing the needs of different actors in the context of discussed projects is of particular importance for the availability of technical and social infrastructure.

Additional challenges may result from conflicts of interest, for example between institutions protecting cultural heritage and investors. From an economic or functional point of view, it may seem more beneficial to demolish an existing facility and erect new buildings, which meets with resistance due to the need to preserve cultural heritage.

6.5.3 Policies

In Poland, addressing housing inequality through nature-based solutions, densification, and retrofitting involves a combination of municipal initiatives and pilot programmes.

In case of retrofitting:

- Programs supporting energy efficiency improvements in residential buildings through financial assistance for thermo-modernization and renovations, aiming to reduce energy poverty and improve living conditions.

In case of NBS interventions:

- Between 2017 and 2019, Poland developed UAPs for 44 large cities to improve resilience to climate change. These plans incorporate NBS to improve urban environments and mitigate climate risks.

- In case of densification process:
- Apartment Plus Programme (Mieszkanie Plus): Launched in 2016 to build affordable rental apartments with an option to own, targeting the construction of 100,000 units by 2025. However, the program has faced challenges in meeting its targets.

6.5.4 Any other relevant outcomes

One of the topics widely discussed during the workshops was the issue of small apartments being introduced to the market by so-called pathological developers, despite not meeting size standards.

In the discussed issues, there were voices that drew attention not only to the economic costs, but also the ecological ones. This aspect was particularly strongly emphasized by the younger participants of the discussion, who pointed to the need to take into account the long-term environmental effects of actions taken.

The discussion focused on the state's fiscal policy, particularly the absence of a property tax (cadastre-based) in Poland. In the area of spatial planning policy, attention was drawn to the low enforceability of the betterment levy, which results in limited municipal revenue from this source. Participants also highlighted elements of the national housing policy that require legislative amendments (e.g., *The Act on the Protection of Tenants' Rights, the Municipal Housing Stock, and the Amendment of the Civil Code, 2001*) or broader implementation (e.g., *The Act on Housing Cooperatives and the Principles for the Disposal of Properties from the Municipal Property Stock to Support the Implementation of Housing Investments, 2022*). The discussion emphasized the multiplicity and diversity of challenges in the housing sector, as well as the variation in these issues between major urban centers such as Warsaw and smaller towns.

In the opinion of the policy lab's participants, these meetings not only provided an opportunity for various stakeholders to present their positions on the issues discussed, but also facilitated interactions between representatives of central and local government, non-governmental organizations, and researchers specializing in housing issues. They enabled the exchange of information and initiated further cooperation. Participants in the discussion representing local governments expressed interest in accessing and applying of the project's findings, considering them valuable for shaping local policies.

6.6 Resources shared

The PolicyLab#1 was based on three introductory presentations by University of Lodz:

1. with the project objectives „*ReHousIn - Contextualized pathways to reduce housing inequalities in the green and digital transition*”,
2. explaining the concepts used in D3.1 Report (retrofitting, densification and NBS),
3. summarizing the findings of D4.1 Report.

7 Spain

7.1 General information

Basic data on the Policy Lab(s)

Date	21 March 2025
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	Institut de Ciències i Tecnologia Ambiental, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Cerdanyola de Vallès, Barcelona, Spain
Number and types of participants	<p>9 participants (+ 8 researchers from ReHousIn + BCNUEJ) from the following sectors or domains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public housing • Urban policy and planning • Environment and sustainability • University Representatives from local and regional governments • Cooperative and alternative housing models • Think tank and NGO professionals focusing on housing rights and social justice • Renters' Union

7.2 Agenda

Welcome and Introduction

- Opening remarks by the organizers
- Brief introduction of participants
- Overview of the Policy Lab objectives and context of the ReHousIn project

Key Findings and Policy Context

- Presentation of main findings from three project reports
- Discussion on the intersection of housing policy and ecological transition initiatives in Spain, with a focus on Catalonia
- Brief overview of three case study areas (Barcelona, Tarragona, Olot)

Stakeholder Roundtable (60 min)

- Open discussion with participants

Thematic Group Sessions (30 min)

Participants were split into three groups to discuss key policy challenges:

- **Group 1:** Housing accessibility and energy rehabilitation challenges

- **Group 2:** Environmental policies and nature-based solutions applied to housing and urban planning
- **Group 3:** Governance, policy harmonization, and residential densification

Discussion guidelines:

- **Main challenges and policy gaps** – What are the key tensions or trade-offs in implementing green policies without worsening housing inequality?
- **Regulatory barriers** – What legal, political, and/or economic obstacles hinder progress in these areas?

Plenary Presentation (30 min): Group representatives summarize key discussion points

COFFEE BREAK – 12:00 PM

Policy Co-Creation Workshop (60 min)

Interactive session: Collaboration among key stakeholders

- **Objective:** Develop concrete policy recommendations
- **Methodology:**
 - Participants rotate between discussion tables, prioritizing three urgent policy actions
 - Brainstorming with post-its, grouping key concepts
 - Identifying intersectoral collaborations needed for implementation

Summary of Discussions (15 min)

- Quick presentations (1–2 min per table) of policy recommendations
- Sticker voting on the most promising ideas
- Feasibility discussion: Which policies could be implemented in the next 1–2 years?

Closing and Next Steps (15 min)

- Summary of key takeaways
- Open Q&A using Mentimeter
- Feedback on the session and interest in a second Policy Lab
- Identification of additional topics for future discussions
- Closing remarks and agreement on follow-up actions

2:30 PM – OPTIONAL LUNCH AT THE FACULTAT DE LLETRES

7.3 Methodology

Collaborative, Iterative, and Grounded in Real-World Experience

The ReHousIn Policy Lab was designed not as a traditional conference, but as an active, participatory space for collaborative problem-solving among a diversity of actors working at the intersection of sustainability and housing or in either one of those domains. The methodology combined structured thematic sessions with open dialogue and co-creation techniques, allowing participants to move between roles of listener, contributor, and policy

designer. We asked participants to speak predominantly as themselves rather than as representatives of the organization/institution they work for.

To start, the day opened with a shared framing of the policy context and key findings from recent research on green and housing inequalities in Spain, with specific focus on the geographical areas of interest (e.g. Catalonia). This grounding helped ensure a common knowledge base across diverse participants—from government officials and housing professionals to academics and civil society actors. Then, the three key themes of the day were presented – retrofits, nature-based solutions, and densification – followed by a collective conceptualization of how these urban processes are playing out in the Spanish context.

Thematic Group Discussions as a Space for Deep Dive and Cross-Pollination

Participants were then divided into three thematic groups, each discussing all three key themes: (1) access to housing and energy rehabilitation, (2) environmental policies and nature-based solutions, and (3) governance and densification. Each group was intentionally mixed to include a range of voices, fostering cross-sector dialogue. Facilitators used guiding questions to surface tensions, policy gaps, and practical challenges in implementation.

This stage was particularly valuable in drawing out grounded insights from real-world experiences—highlighting not just what policies exist, but how they play out in specific urban contexts. The discussions often moved fluidly between local examples (e.g., rooftop additions in Barcelona, retrofit pilots in Navarra) and broader structural considerations (e.g., inequality in access to subsidies, territorial imbalances across Catalonia and Spain more generally).

Policy Co-Creation Through Rotating Tables and Collective Prioritization

The final portion of the day shifted toward co-creation. Participants changed groups and focused on identifying urgent and actionable policy interventions around the three themes listed above. Using tools like sticky notes and idea clustering, they brainstormed solutions, identified enabling conditions, and mapped potential collaborations across sectors. This iterative approach allowed ideas to evolve across multiple perspectives and built momentum toward shared priorities.

To close the session, participants presented the most promising ideas in plenary. This not only surfaced key policy directions but also revealed areas of convergence—where participants from different backgrounds saw potential for immediate action and for collaboration moving forward. Participants then took turns sharing in what format the findings from the ReHousIn project would be most useful for their work.

Challenges in recruitment

The intersection of housing justice, energy, and environmental policy is a well-established topic in Spain—particularly in cities like Barcelona and Madrid, where similar events are held frequently. As a result, it was challenging to convince potential participants of the unique value of our Policy Lab, especially given their already saturated calendars.

We also observed a clear political and geographical divide in response rates. For example, several officials from city halls across Catalonia—particularly those affiliated with centrist, center-right, or right-wing parties—declined to participate or did not respond to our invitations, even in cases where their municipalities are actively involved in retrofit or housing initiatives. It was a struggle to find a representative of any relevant state ministries in Madrid to attend; we eventually were able to invite an advisor to the Minister of Housing and Urban Agenda who had previously been an advisor to the Barcelona City Hall. Another housing official who attended, now working in the Autonomous Community of Navarra, also previously worked for Barcelona City Hall.

That said, those who did attend repeatedly highlighted the intimate, expert-focused format of the event as a major strength. The smaller group size and the shared baseline of knowledge among participants created space for deeper, more candid dialogue—something often lacking in larger, more generalized forums. They also welcomed discussions on themes that were rarely covered in their area of work or in prior events they attended: Green inequalities or inequalities and injustices in the green transition.

Importantly, many of the individuals who declined the invitation expressed interest in participating in future fieldwork interviews, suggesting that while presential, event-based engagement may be challenging, there remains an opportunity to involve them through more targeted, one-on-one formats.

7.4 Main starting/discussion points

"Energy-efficient retrofits are a win-win for everyone."

While the environmental benefits of retrofitting are widely accepted, the group explored how such interventions can unintentionally lead to rent increases or displacement if not paired with tenant protections. The hypothesis that retrofit = automatic social benefit was critically examined. Also, a common point was that retrofits may reduce housing inequalities in terms of thermal comfort or energy bills, but this is a different element of inequality than access to affordable housing within itself.

"Densification is inherently sustainable."

This assumption was debated in relation to its real-world impacts on neighborhood life, access to public space, and urban equity. Participants noted that while densification can reduce sprawl, it must be carefully managed to avoid negative social and environmental consequences. It was emphasized that Barcelona—and Spanish settlements in general—are already among the densest in Europe, and the density imperative is less relevant to Southern European cases.

"Green infrastructure benefits all urban residents equally."

The group explored how urban greening, if poorly implemented, can produce or accelerate gentrification and displace vulnerable communities. This challenged the idea that nature-based solutions are universally beneficial for all residents and over the long-term, emphasizing the need for equity-focused planning that considers unintended social consequences.

"Private sector investment is essential for scaling up housing solutions."

While public-private partnerships are often seen as necessary, participants questioned the conditions under which private actors contribute to long-term affordability and sustainability, and whether public interests are adequately protected.

"Tenants are passive recipients in the housing system."

Discussions challenged the structural invisibility of renters in decision-making processes—especially in contexts like building renovations or neighborhood planning—and called for mechanisms to elevate tenant agency. In part, this is because most people in Spain live in multi-unit buildings in which key decisions (retrofit, other structural work) are decided by homeowners' associations, leaving tenants without a say. The discussion also focused on how municipalities (and other levels of government) can better support the retrofit applications and process of these associations.

7.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

7.5.1 Knowledge level

- Without exception, participants brought a high level of expertise to the Policy Lab. Many had in-depth, practical experience—working directly on housing retrofitting, urban planning, or the integration of sustainability measures in cities across Spain and Catalonia. Some represented government bodies or public housing agencies actively managing retrofit or densification projects, while others came from academia, research institutes, or grassroots organizations, contributing theoretical insights and policy critiques. We consider three of the attendees to be the most important housing policy analysts in current-day Spain, and it was a privilege to share a space with them and think together.
- There was broad familiarity with core concepts like energy efficient retrofits, soft densification, and nature-based solutions (NbS), and the implementation of NextGen funding. Importantly, many participants were not only aware of these frameworks but had hands-on experience applying or navigating them, particularly in metropolitan Barcelona. For instance, geographically specific examples such as rooftop extensions (remuntas), green corridors, and retrofit pilots were shared in detail.
- The most robust discussions emerged around implementation challenges—such as navigating community resistance, legal barriers, or conflicting policy objectives between energy savings and social inclusion. This reflects a maturity in understanding not just the “what” of policy, with which participants came with considerable knowledge, but the crucial questions of “how” and “for whom.”

7.5.2 Attitude

Participants shared critical and nuanced views of how green transition policies—though well-intentioned—typically fail to reach the most vulnerable. A recurring sentiment was that

benefits do not trickle down, especially in cities with significant housing stress. Along with overt displacement, many pointed to structural exclusion: the way certain communities are bypassed entirely by green investments, such as energy retrofits or urban greening efforts, or how lower-income people are forced into substandard, illegal “infravivienda”. This further raised the dual nature around housing equality: on the one hand, access to affordable housing, and on the other, ensuring standards of thermal comfort, adequate ventilation, etc.

There was also widespread concern—not only of activists, but also of insiders in housing policy and provision—that green policies can unintentionally accelerate gentrification, principally when public or private investments in green infrastructure raise surrounding land values. There was the question of whether land value capture was adequately employed. Participants noted that rent increases often follow retrofitting projects, particularly when tenant protections are weak. The disconnect between who pays and who benefits—for example, owners receiving public subsidies while tenants face rising costs—was a consistent theme, as well as concerns for property owners benefiting from public subsidies to then sell their properties.

Moreover, the symbolic appeal of “green” policies sometimes obscures their social consequences. Participants emphasized that if not paired with equity measures, green interventions are likely to deepen urban inequalities rather than alleviate them. They also highlighted the siloed governance of green initiatives, with little coordination between environmental action and housing policies.

7.5.3 Policy/Practice

A wide range of policy tools and practices were proposed to mitigate the unequal impacts of green housing transitions. Among the most frequently mentioned were:

- Community engagement and education efforts before retrofits or social housing projects begin, to build trust and reduce local resistance—particularly in neighborhoods with histories of exclusion or gentrification concerns.
- Social accompaniment/support components in retrofit programs, designed to inform, support, and include residents throughout the process—not just the technical upgrade phase.
- Flexible zoning and planning regulations to enable ground-floor commercial space conversions into housing in areas with low retail demand.
- Incentivizing soft densification, such as rooftop additions, subdividing large flats, or adapting vacant buildings, especially when paired with affordability guarantees.
- Prioritizing protected housing (e.g., VPO or cooperatives) when increasing density, and ensuring that new units contribute to mixed-income, inclusive neighborhoods and that public housing remains available over the long term, rather than becoming part of market-price housing after a 20 or 25 year “embargo”

Several participants also suggested linking retrofit funding to longer-term affordability conditions—such as tying improvements to long-term rent caps, social housing obligations, or

requiring homeowners to return subsidies if selling their properties—to ensure that public investment yields public benefit. These approaches have been implemented in the City of Barcelona, but there is a debate around the best way to implement such restrictions.

Multi-level governance emerged as both a barrier and an opportunity. Participants consistently pointed to the misalignment between national funding schemes, regional planning policies, and municipal implementation capacity. There are often debates around the convoluted and overly-complex of “competencies” of various scales of government to implement policy; this may be used as an excuse for some authorities to fail to, or choose not to, act. On the other hand, higher levels of the state are often perceived as barriers to innovation or effective action. This often results in delays, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for integrating environmental and social goals. One of those was the 2022 decision of the Supreme Court of Spain to eliminate the Catalan Rental Law passed in 2020 (the law was aimed to cap rental prices in 61 municipalities identified as having “tense housing markets,” including large cities like Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona).

To an extent, those obstacles have been remedied in Barcelona through creations of multi-level institutions for housing policy and implementation, like the Barcelona Housing Consortium, which brings the city, metropolitan, and regional governments together. Yet, local governments may be eager to implement green retrofits or densification projects, but they often lack the legal authority or financial flexibility to enforce affordability requirements or adjust zoning regulations. At the same time, regional or national programs are sometimes designed with one-size-fits-all models that don’t reflect local realities or housing needs. Lastly, the political right and housing lobbies often enact “lawfare” to slow down or strike down policies focused on housing affordability through lawsuits.

Despite these challenges, participants saw potential in improved coordination and cross-scalar collaboration—especially if national and EU-level funding frameworks begin to require stronger equity criteria and support local experimentation. Some also suggested that municipalities could play a convening role, bringing together civil society, technical experts, and residents to co-produce solutions.

7.5.4 Any other relevant outcomes

Relevance for future research (WP5)

The insights gathered during the Policy Lab will directly inform the structure and focus of fieldwork activities in WP5. Discussions revealed the need to interrogate not just policies on paper, but how they play out in specific urban environments—highlighting barriers at the building, neighborhood, and governance levels and the need for public sector collaboration with academic researchers to evaluate impacts.

Participants offered critical input on core concepts, such as densification as well as important “reality checks” that will help define our research’s next steps. For instance, the idea that densification is not solely about population increase, but also about the number, size, and types of housing units, was a recurring theme. This distinction will guide how we frame interview questions, particularly in neighborhoods undergoing ‘*remunta*’ projects – or the

vertical extension of an existing building, typically by adding one or more new floors on top of the current structure - or subdivision of large flats.

In essence, the Policy Lab helped clarify:

- Which actors to engage (e.g., tenant associations, municipal planners, retrofit coordinators, homeowners' associations, building administration companies),
- What policy tensions to explore (e.g., affordability vs. efficiency, inclusion vs. speed, scale, process of identification of land for public housing construction),
- What local experiences and case studies could best illustrate the justice implications of retrofitting, densifying, and greening urban space.

These outputs will be instrumental in shaping both the research focus and the methodological approach of the next work package.

Primary beneficiaries of major housing-related green transition policies in Spain

Participants consistently identified **middle-class owner-occupier households** in buildings that are predominantly owner-occupied, in well-serviced urban areas, as the main beneficiaries. Being as most Spaniards live in blocks of apartments, the process would typically begin by a resident proposing an energy-efficient retrofit to their homeowners' association, which is presided by a private administrator, many of whom are not well informed about how subsidies work or the long-term benefits of retrofit.

Meanwhile, **private companies** like Effic—set up as a subsidiary of the private equity firm Blackstone to take advantage of NextGen retrofit subsidies and leader in the Spanish retrofit market—are among the main non-resident beneficiaries. Large institutional investors like Effic have gained from opportunities to increase property value, especially in new developments or redevelopment zones. Some noted that many buildings undergoing retrofit, constructed between the 1960s and 1980s, were originally constructed as social housing (VPO) but are now in private hands after seeing their 20 or 25 “embargo” period on market-price sale expire. Those residents' associations who are successful in accessing retrofit subsidies have among their residents and building administrators the knowledge and administrative capacity to access subsidy programs, navigate application processes, and invest in upgrades. One housing policymaker suggested that such a process tended to be initiated by “your typical architect or researcher neighbor.”

Public housing stock has benefitted in some cases—and this tends to be the most simple and direct way for public institutions to deliver retrofitting—but this often depends on the administrative will and technical capacity of specific municipalities. It should be emphasized that, even as this approach is underway, public housing only accounts for around 2% of all housing units in Catalonia and in Spain as a whole.

Who has been most negatively affected by housing-related green transition policies?

The group most at risk are **renters**, especially those from lower-income, racialized, or migrant backgrounds. As energy efficiency measures and green amenities raise neighborhood appeal

and property values, tenants face rising rents and the threat of displacement, despite often not benefiting directly from the improvements.

Many participants also noted that **informal tenants or those in overcrowded conditions** are systematically excluded from programs tied to formal tenancy or property ownership—further entrenching inequality. The broader takeaway was that without intentional equity mechanisms, green transition efforts risk reinforcing the very injustices they aim to address.

Lastly, considering that regulations will require most homes in Spain to increase their energy efficiency through energy certificates, those **homeowners who cannot afford to retrofit their homes or do not know how to access subsidies** have been flagged as potentially being put in a position of economic hardship down the line.

7.6 Resources shared

Researchers from UAB presented findings from WP2, WP3, and WP4 reports as well as further trends on green gentrification and trends of housing inequalities based on previous and other ongoing research from the Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability. These presentations were shared with participants. At the end of the event, participants expressed interest in receiving both the PowerPoints as well as summaries of the WP2, WP3, and WP4 reports (in Spanish), a task which is currently being undertaken by our team.

8 Switzerland

8.1 General information

Basic data on the Policy Lab(s)

Date	
Location (indicate, if hybrid)	Bahnhofplatz 2, 9001 St.Gallen, "Historischer Saal" (in person event)
Number and types of participants	<p>28 participants representing the following organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Federal Office of Housing - Federal Office of Energy - Federal Office of Spatial Planning - Cantonal Office for Spatial Development Zurich - Cantonal Office for Spatial Development Thurgau - Cantonal Office for Housing Subsidy (SG, TG, AI) - Building Directorate St.Gallen - Office for Environment and Energy St.Gallen - Office for Urban Planning St.Gallen - Office for Urban green areas St.Gallen - Office for Urban green areas Amriswil - Tenants' Association Zurich - Swiss Homeowners Associations - Association of Housing cooperatives Switzerland - Association of Housing cooperatives Zurich - Association of Housing cooperatives Eastern Switzerland - Housing cooperative ABZ - Housing cooperative St.Gallen - Axa Winterthur (private developer) - Intep (Sustainability consulting and applied research) - Wincasa (private developer) - Pensimo (private developer) - ETH SPUR (Institute for Spatial Planning and Urban Politics) - Fachhochschule OST (Institute for Social Work and Space) - ZHAW (Institute for Social Work) - EAWAG (Swiss Federal institute of Aquatic Science & Technology)

8.2 Agenda

Agenda, as planned and conducted:

10.45–11.00: Registration

11.00–11.15: Welcome + General introduction to the project and Policy Lab objectives by Jennifer Duyne Barenstein

11.15–11.45: Presentation by Markus Buschor (Head, Planning and Construction Directorate, City of St.Gallen), “Spatial planning and housing policy in the City of St.Gallen”

11.45–12.15: Q&A session

12.15–13.15: Standing Lunch

13.30–13.45: Presentation of the ReHousIn Project, organisation and goals of the Policy Lab by Hannah Widmer and Salome Rohner

13.45–15.00: 3 parallel focus groups on the effects of green policies on housing

15.00–15.15: Coffee break

15.15–16.15: Group reports and plenary discussion

16.15–16.30: Closing remarks

16.30–17.30: Apéro & Networking

8.3 Methodology

The first Policy Lab of the ReHousIn project in Switzerland was organised in cooperation with the city of St.Gallen, representing the medium-sized city that we selected for further research. St. Gallen is located in the east of the country and is centrally located in relation to Zurich and Amriswil, the small city to be studied in the framework of the ReHousIn project. Conducting the Policy Lab in St.Gallen also had the advantage of mitigating the risk that discussions would be dominated by the better-known issues and debates taking place in large cities. With St.Gallen as the host city, the Policy Lab was opened with a keynote by the City Council on the St.Gallen’s spatial planning and housing policies. His presentation offered a good and contextualised introduction to the themes to be discussed during the day.

The Policy Lab programme focused on the interlinkages between housing challenges and EEP. After a short introduction by the research team, the participants were divided in three groups, each discussing housing challenges in relation to one of the three EEP (densification, energy refurbishments, and NBS). Based on our understanding that all invited participants already came with a high level of awareness on related topics, the inputs from the ReHousIn team were limited to providing background information on the project and on the objectives and organisation of the Policy Lab.

We employed a professional moderator, which allowed us most of the time to assume the role of observers and to take notes during the group- and the plenary discussions. The three groups were organised so as to ensure a mix of representatives from different organisations and governance levels. Altogether, a suitable number of participants attended, although the municipal governments of Zurich and Amriswil were less represented than St.Gallen. The workshop lasted from 11:00 to 17:30, a time sufficient to give participants the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the objectives of the Policy Lab, exchange views informally over lunch and actively engage in focused discussions in the framework of the then breakout- and plenary discussion.

8.4 Main starting/discussion points

All invited Policy Lab participants either had an expertise related to one of the EEP or were active stakeholders in the domain of housing. Our main objective was to gain a better understanding of their knowledge and attitudes on the interlinkages between EEPs and housing issues. Accordingly, we decided to structure the discussions to be held in the Policy Lab by focusing in three thematic block and six questions (see table 4.1)

Tab. 4.1 Questions discussed in Policy Lab break-up sessions

<p>(i) <i>Current situation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the relationship between densification/energy efficient retrofitting/NBS and fair access to affordable housing perceived at national, cantonal and local level? Is there a trade-off between these objectives? - What are the similarities and the differences between large, medium-sized and small cities regarding the promotion of climate goals through densification, energy refurbishments and NBS while ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing? <p>(ii) <i>Effectiveness and limits of current measures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What specific measures have already been taken or are being discussed to reconcile climate goals through densification/energy refurbishments/NBS and ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing or to mitigate any conflicting objectives? - What cooperation exists between the public sector, the private sector and civil society organisations at national, cantonal and local level to combine both objectives, and where is there a need for more cooperation? (Horizontal cooperation) - What cooperation exists between different levels of government and administration, and where would additional cooperation be needed? (Vertical cooperation) <p>(iii) <i>Ideas for further policy measures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What policy measures would be needed to promote densification/energy efficient retrofitting/NBS while ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing?

The questions were the same for each group, but Group A the focus was on densification, in Group B on Energy Refurbishments, and in Group C on NBS. Every group nominated a 'moderator' to keep track of time and topic, and a 'reporter' who would present a summary of

the discussion held in the group in the plenary session. Depending on the group, more emphasis was put on some questions, but overall, all questions were discussed. After 1h15' and a short coffee break, each group gave a summary of what had been discussed at the table. All participants were then able to react and add their perspectives in the plenary session.

8.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

8.5.1 Overall awareness on interlinkages between housing issues and EEP

- Overall, all participants were aware about the current housing crisis prevailing in some Swiss metropolitan areas and about the interlinkages between EEP and housing affordability, in particular with regard to densification and energy refurbishment. There was, however, a general consensus that whether and how EEP had a negative impact on housing affordability also depends on several other factors, such as the overall socioeconomic and housing market condition of a city or metropolitan area along with their urban qualities. With regard to NBS, even though greening of cities and other NBS aiming at promoting biodiversity or adapting to climate change are already being implemented primarily in large and medium cities, they are generally not known under the term NBS and so far, there is hardly any awareness on their impact on housing.
- With regard to densification all participants were aware that in Switzerland, following the revision of the Spatial Planning Act, densification is legally binding for all communes and there is consensus that a parsimonious use of Switzerland's scarce land resources is necessary. However, participants pointed out that building density does not always lead to a higher use density. Accordingly, more dense construction does not solve the problem; floor consumption per capita needs to be reduced and incentivized and apartment typologies reflecting the current demographic structure are needed.
- It was argued that many small communes have not yet completed the revision of their zoning plans and accordingly densification is not yet being implemented or is just about to start. Accordingly, its impacts on the housing market will only start to show in 10-15 years. The situation is entirely different in large cities, such as Zurich, where no green- and brownfields are left for densification, and where land prices have dramatically increased. In these cases, it is known that densification leads to the replacement of the existing old, less dense but affordable housing stock, with negative social impacts. The interlinkages between densification and energy policies were emphasized by several participants. In fact, demolitions in large cities are often the result of a combination of densification incentives along with the demand for more energy efficient buildings.
- Participants coming from smaller cities saw a great potential of densification in areas currently characterized by detached single family houses. However, it was argued that their owners generally have no incentive to leave their houses and that a generational change is needed before densification can take place in these contexts.
- In general, challenges caused by Switzerland's legally binding densification policy are felt at all levels, but due to the federal system, many are context-specific and solved at

the local level. As a result, context-specific challenges and solutions remain unknown to others, or perceived differently. It was argued that cooperation between different institutions and levels of governance (horizontally and vertically) does not always work satisfactorily. Tensions between politicians and administrations are seen as a big obstacle to densification

- The most common view with regard to energy refurbishments that emerged in the group discussion on this topic was that it is not so much energy refurbishments that are causing housing inequalities, but the prioritisation of climate targets over social targets at national level. The lack of regulations or definitions related to social sustainability leads to severe challenges for individuals, municipal social infrastructure (like schools, daycare etc.) and municipal social departments (social services, healthcare, etc). The 'social costs' of redevelopments, such as the displacement of vulnerable households, elderly people, and families with children, are externalised and often ignored. The group further discussed the challenges to assess the impact of energy refurbishments on housing costs, as they are always carried out in combination with value-adding refurbishments such as changing the floor plans. These are the types of improvements, rather than the energy refurbishments, that provide a legal basis for rent increases. Accordingly, energy refurbishments cannot be discussed in isolation and their effects on the housing market must be understood in relation to the overall economic and housing market where they are implemented: in a context characterised by an overheated housing market, refurbishments often become a pretext for investors to increase rents to a maximum. On the other hand, in regions characterised by a stagnant housing market energy refurbishments are not considered profitable and public subsidies are not sufficient to stimulate property owners to undertake refurbishments. As a result, energy refurbishments are not taking place everywhere, in spite of public subsidies being provided by all cantons; Only in densely populated, central areas can rents be increased to an extent that is profitable to the owners. Because of Switzerland's federal structure, the responsibility for regulating construction is primarily held by municipalities, with some influence of cantonal legislations. According to several Policy Lab participants, this can be an obstacle to addressing the negative social impacts of EEP on the housing market challenges at the municipal level. Better dialogue with all stakeholders and between levels of government is needed to tackle the problem at national level.
- With regard to NBS, as was mentioned, the concept and its connection with housing affordability was not familiar to everyone in the group. The discussion revolved around the extent to which NBS can be legally justified as value-enhancing measures and would thus allow a rent increase in the framework of the Swiss tenancy law. It was agreed that the implementation of NBS on private or public land is fundamentally different regarding the actors involved, funding and impacts; green interventions in public spaces only trigger an increase in rent and house prices several years later, so the correlation is difficult to assess. Everyone agreed that the political orientation of the local government determines to which extent NBS are being implemented, with conservative municipalities being less inclined to invest in NBS. This can hamper the progress of the green transition, especially because regulatory instruments at cantonal

level to incentivize NBS are still missing. It is estimated that while housing cooperatives and some large institutional housing owners are already implementing NBS because of their greater commitment towards sustainable development and/or thanks to a more long-term investment strategy, smaller private owners of housing stock often lack knowledge and financial incentives to do so.

8.5.2 Policies and practices identified to cope with housing inequality

- Generally, three strategies to promote or protect affordable housing were mentioned: the first is special use planning, which unfortunately often leads to the demolition of existing housing stock and rebuilding. The second is for the city to lease land with building rights to non-profit organisations. The third is to promote affordable and social housing through specific programmes, as in the case of Zurich, where the city is committed to achieve one third of non-profit housing by 2050, and/or through legislation to promote affordable housing, such as through inclusionary zoning (e.g. Geneva) or stronger tenant protection (e.g. Basel).
- The densification group recognised that flanking measures are required to mitigate the negative impact of densification on housing affordability. Participants mostly referred to approaches that are already implemented by some municipalities, such as special land use plans (*Sondernutzungspläne*) that can be used to define a certain quota of affordable housing within specific zones. There are exemplary approaches that were adopted by some cities, where the protection of affordable housing is integrated in spatial planning via rent control (e.g. Geneva). The recent employment of a Delegate for Housing in Zurich, is viewed as an interesting innovation that could enable a better horizontal cooperation among different agencies and actors and ensure that the housing question remains at the centre of all domains. Some participants suggested that more and faster construction of housing is needed and required shortening and simplifying the procedures to obtain a building permit. The need to adapt housing supply to the demand in terms of housing typologies was also discussed. It was argued that too many dwellings are underoccupied and that housing designs should be better adapted to the households' lifecycle. Apartment exchanges between shrinking and growing households should be incentivised as already done by housing cooperatives and some large residential property owners. Sufficiency values and policies should be promoted to avoid underoccupancy and to reach densification goals. However, the adoption of such policies primarily depends on the local government.
- The participants of the energy refurbishment group agreed that the federal and cantonal authorities should be given a greater responsibility in the housing sector and provide more guidance to the municipalities. The term 'social sustainability' should be defined more clearly and effective social sustainability assessment tools should be adopted. Representatives of government institutions emphasized the need for better horizontal and vertical cooperation between government agencies. To achieve socially sustainable refurbishments without displacement, various departments within the municipal administration (e.g. social services, city planning, subsidy administration etc.) need to improve their cooperation. Alternatively, a privately organized system to incentivize socially sustainable energy refurbishments through labels or by assessing

tenants' satisfaction were proposed. Another idea was that local authorities should introduce social impact assessments tools as part of the process of granting building permits. Other recommendations include streamlining processes, 'pragmatism', sharing of know-how down to the local level and organising a dialogue with all stakeholders.

- The discussions in the NBS group focused on how to implement NBS at local level. Apparently, regulatory instruments on a cantonal level would be helpful to enhance the commitment of municipalities towards ecological goals. A mandate for strategies or plans (e.g. for climate adaptation or biodiversity) from cantonal or federal level could be useful for smaller municipalities to overcome the reluctance of local governments with a conservative political orientation. Larger municipalities usually have the resources and political support to develop such strategies anyway. This shows that awareness of the tension between NBS and housing affordability is less developed than in the case of densification and energy refurbishments.

8.5.3 Emerging issues

There was a general consensus among all participants that the severity of the impact of green transition measures on housing does not depend on the size of the city, but on its regional location and the pressure on the housing market in the region as a whole. Peripheral locations suffer from stagnation, lack of refurbishments, and densification, while urban centers cannot cope with the immense housing demand anymore.

ii. Energy refurbishment targets can only be achieved in locations where there is a high housing demand. Small and medium-sized cities are affected insofar by the consequences of the housing crisis caused by refurbishments and densification in large cities as they also receive the displaced residents from larger cities. Due to the so-called tenant-landlord dilemma (or principal-agent problem), they suffer from a refurbishment backlog (e.g. St.Gallen).

iii. Several participants found that vertical and horizontal collaborations between government agencies were insufficient and that more communication and discussions across governmental levels would be needed. The connection between the federal government and cities needs to be more direct and not mediated by cantons. The implementation of national policies at the local level is often very challenging due to context-specific factors. On this issue, a representative of the city of Zurich stated "...in Zurich, we don't feel understood by the federal government as a city. The canton always stands in the way".

iv. As a result of Switzerland's federal structure, communes enjoy a high degree of autonomy in several domains. The local political orientation largely determines the use or non-use of policy instruments aiming at densification, energy refurbishments and NBS. This is not only an obstacle for the implementation of climate relevant strategies, but also for the promotion of affordable housing.

v. Housing cooperatives stressed that the non-profit housing sector in some cities is under great pressure to solve social problems caused by the competitive housing market resulting from liberal policies and by the demolition of affordable housing. The high demands on the

non-profit sector in return in return to public support can be challenging, especially for small cooperatives.

vi. Due to market related mechanisms, owners of housing stock in fast growing municipalities benefit most from green transition policies. The increasing value of their properties allows them to refurbish or rebuild their houses and increase rents (according to the tenancy law, all value-adding investments can be passed on to tenants by 50-70%, and in case of termination of rental contracts, rents can be raised significantly). In municipalities where there are no regulations to better protect the interests of tenants, owners are free to terminate contracts and raise rents based on market conditions.

vii. As mentioned above, the location within a regional competitive market is most decisive for the impact of green policies on housing. The pressure on the housing market catalyses the negative effects of green transition policies, because they can be considered as value-adding measures and thus cause rent increases. People living in housing in need of refurbishment in places characterised by an overheated housing market are most severely affected. Such housing is usually affordable and inhabited by vulnerable groups such as single parent households, elderly people, and migrants, who are increasingly being displaced.

8.5.4 Relevance of Policy Lab outputs for further research (WP5)

- The Policy Lab highlighted the different perspectives and latent tensions between federal, cantonal and local governments and the very context-specific problems and perspectives. It clearly showed that the progress with the implementation of EEP varies significantly across the three case study cities, depending on their overall socio-economic conditions and political orientation.
- The insights of stakeholders from the private sector can be very valuable, because they operate within the logic of the market. The influence of green building labels (local, national and global) has to be considered as they are important for institutional owners, particularly in big cities.
- The insufficient horizontal and vertical communication among different categories of actors must be considered in the case studies. WP5 could provide an opportunity to interview people at the local level about their ideas on how to improve the communication across governance levels and organisations.
- Participants mentioned examples of initiatives and projects within their cities which could be considered in the case studies.

8.6 Resources shared

- Concept note sent along the invitation to participants
- List of participants by organisation
- Welcome address by Jennifer Duyne Barenstein
- Presentation by Markus Buschor, Head of Building Directorate, City Council of St.Gallen

- Presentation by Hannah Widmer und Salome Rohner
- Image documentation of Policy Lab

9 United Kingdom

9.1 General information

Date	19 March 2025	26 March
Location	Online event	In-person event, Central House, Bartlett School of Planning, UCL
Number types and of participants	<p>10 people joined the event,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Local / regional authority representatives • 2 people from housing associations • 2 people from development companies • 2 academics • 1 NGO representative • Representatives attended from across England including the main city, small town and rural locations 	<p>12 people joined the event,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 person from central government departments • 4 Local / regional authority representatives • 2 people from housing associations • 2 people from development companies • 2 academics • 1 NGO representative • Representatives attended from across scales of governance including central government, the main city, small town and rural locations

9.2 Agenda

The agenda, as was planned and implemented, was the following:

19th March 13:00-15:00: online presentation of the EU project and Q&A

- 13:00: Introducing the project
- 13:10 Tensions between domestic retrofitting and an equitable access to adequate and affordable housing
- 13:30: Tensions between nature-based solutions and an equitable access to adequate and affordable housing
- 13:50 Tensions between densification / regeneration and an equitable access to adequate and affordable housing

- 14:10 Summary and hypotheses
- 14:25 Open Q&A
- 14:45 Prompt questions for discussion

26 March 13:00-16:00: in-person workshop

- 13:00-13:30: Lunch and welcome by Phoebe Stirling: background of the policy lab and its objectives
- 13:30-14:15: Group discussions
- 14:15-14:30: Coffee break
- 14:30-15:15: Group discussions
- 15:15-16:00: Q&A and closing remarks

9.3 Methodology

The event was divided into two half-day workshops:

- The first (online) event was largely a presentation of our initial findings and hypotheses regarding tensions between retrofitting / NBS / densification initiatives and equitable access to adequate and affordable housing, with some time given for questions of clarification and discussion.
- The second (in-person) event was designed to allow relevant stakeholders to share their insights into how retrofitting / NBS / densification initiatives work in policy and practice on the ground, and also to engage in group discussions around 1) how these initiatives might interact with housing outcomes, 2) context-specific challenges, and 3) possible solutions and good practices.

The purpose of dividing the event into two separate events was two-fold. Firstly, it allows participants to consider their contributions, once they are more familiar with the framing and hypotheses of the project. Secondly, it allows participants to speak with their teams internally to secure buy-in and prepare which aspects they are happy for to discuss. This approach proved useful for individuals who were unsure whether they would be able to attend due to confidentiality issues; we were able to assure them that they would have time to consider their contributions between the presentation of our project, and their own participation in the workshop. Nevertheless this approach also has limitations, for example some participants were unable to attend both events.

19th March 13:00-15:00: online presentation of the EU project and Q&A

The online presentation aimed to familiarise the audience with the framing used in this project. As noted by other partners, terms like ‘green gentrification’ are not always well known, so it was important to explain the key conceptual framing we are using, with the opportunity for questions of clarification in plenary, where all participants could benefit from any questions of clarification.

This session was also used to present to participants our preliminary work around how retrofitting, NBS and regeneration/densification are rolled out nationally and locally in the UK case. As stakeholders represented different scales of governance and operation, this was an opportunity to provide participants with a basic explanation of how these initiatives work as a whole apparatus, from policy at different scales of governance through to implementation.

We also used this session to explain to participants our hypotheses for potential impacts on housing access and affordability. For each green initiative, we explained our hypotheses about how these might interact with housing access and affordability, through (for example) rising costs for social housing providers, area-based gentrification, or constraints to local authority direct delivery of homes.

26 March 13:00-16:00: in-person workshop

One key aim of the in-person workshop was to interrogate the hypotheses created by the UCL about the consequences of the three green initiatives (retrofitting, NBS and regeneration/densification) for housing inequality. These had been established through desk-based research and a review of literature, so interrogating these through discussion with participants about their 'on-the-ground' experience was invaluable.

Another key aim was to allow participants to share their 'on-the-ground' experience with other stakeholders active at other scales of governance or stages of implementation. By creating a space for joint discussion, and allowing participants to share challenges and opportunities that have emerged at different points in the implementation of these initiatives, we were able to create new, more nuanced understandings and hypotheses about how housing inequality might be impacted.

After a brief introduction we divided the participants into three thematic groups:

- Group A: Domestic retrofit and housing challenges
- Group B: Nature based solutions and housing challenges
- Group C: Urban densification/regeneration and housing challenges

Each group discussed how each initiative works in their experience, and at different levels of governance. What are the main challenges? How do they interact with housing provision, development, and access (both social and private)?

Our hypotheses on the consequences of each green initiative for housing inequality were printed and shared in all three groups, for discussion: Can the hypotheses outlined by UCL be illustrated with specific examples? Or do they miss crucial aspects that might affect housing access and affordability? How might any challenges be overcome? How might different types of stakeholder and different levels of governance cooperate? What further measures are needed? (A list of prompts was given to each group at the beginning of the session).

Each group contained a mix of stakeholders from different levels of governance / operation, and we were satisfied with the mixture of profiles, as well as the number of participants, as providing an appropriate context for in-depth conversation.

With more time to organise the policy lab workshops, we might have hoped to reach more participants and a greater range of profiles. For example, local / regional authorities were represented in each thematic group, but we were unable to secure a national-level representative for each group (only for the domestic retrofit thematic group). Representatives were available for most case study areas but not for the English rural town, although we were able to welcome representatives of rural areas more broadly. This was the main limitation of the workshop, however given the scope of the ReHousIn project, we managed to reach a broad range of scales of governance and operation, and most of our case study areas.

9.4 Main starting/discussion points

19th March 13:00-15:00: online presentation of the EU project and Q&A

Prompt questions for discussion

- You are the experts - sense checking our understanding of these policy areas. Have we missed anything? Are there factors we haven't considered?
- Are there ways that costs, relationships or market dynamics add complexity to policy design and implementation?
- Are there other ways that you see the roll-out of retrofitting / NBS / densification interact with housing provision, access and affordability?
- What might help? What opportunities could be harnessed? What workarounds already exist or are people considering?
- Are there specific measures already in place or being discussed, to reconcile these climate initiatives and the right to adequate and affordable housing?
- What horizontal collaborations exist or might be required across departments and between the public and the private sector at national, regional, and local level?
- What vertical collaborations exist or might be required across departments and between the public and the private sector at national, regional, and local level?

26 March 13:00-16:00: in-person workshop

Breakout sessions amongst thematic groups were organised around four major topics:

- The market
- Multi-level governance
- Tensions between retrofitting / NBS / densification, and equitable access to adequate and affordable housing
- What might help?

The inequality hypotheses we provided were the following:

In case of domestic retrofitting:

- Since local authorities and housing associations must match funds for state-funded retrofit programmes, there is the potential for rising rents within the social housing sector.
- The cost of private retrofit installation for the broader population remains extremely high (state-funded schemes for private owners, tenants and landlords have not succeeded in catalysing a fully functional retrofit industry to provide retrofit at an affordable price at scale).
- There is some indication that good-quality retrofits can increase house values. This means that those who have been able to afford retrofit installation could benefit further from house price rises, locking certain groups out of these homes.
- Area-based schemes (where whole streets or local areas can benefit from retrofit improvements) could lock certain groups out of these areas, if house prices are affected.
- Those living in London, where house values are highest, may be more able to access retrofit mortgages.

In case of nature-based solutions:

- Coordinating biodiversity net-gain (BNG) both on- and off-site is a recent addition to affordable housing providers' costs – with the potential to affect affordable housing delivery.
- Where developers design their BNG Plans with enhancing property values in mind, they may pursue a limited range of nature-based solutions (NBS), which may not provide the greatest natural or social value in newly developed areas.
- Choices around location may also channel economic, social and environmental benefits into the most expensive and desirable areas of mixed-tenure developments, entrenching inequalities.
- The different capacity constraints of local authorities in different parts of the country (who are responsible for coordinating provision of NBS through the creation of new Local Nature Recovery Strategies) could have implications for how NBS are rolled out in practice, through interactions with the developers engaged in these processes.

In case of densification:

- Encourages the gentrification of areas designated for regeneration
- Transfers the value inherent in public land (including social housing estates) to the private sector.
- Limits the possibility of direct delivery of housing by local authorities.
- Social housing delivery relies on cross-subsidy from private tenure production and results in a net decline in social homes.
- Opportunities: various innovative programmes of the GLA intended to support local authority housing delivery.

- Opportunities: removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap in 2018 increased local authority access to finance, some have created 'local housing companies' for direct delivery.

Prompts for interrogation of these hypotheses included:

- Thinking about the hypotheses we have outline above, what aspects we have not considered? Are there ways that costs arise, or certain relationships or market dynamics add complexity to policy design and implementation?
- Are there any completely new or different ways that you see the roll-out of retrofitting / NBS / densification interact with housing provision, access and affordability?

Our hypotheses on the consequences of each green initiative for housing inequality were printed and shared in all three groups, for discussion: Can the hypotheses outlined by UCL be illustrated with specific examples? Or do they miss crucial aspects that might affect housing access and affordability? How might any challenges be overcome? How might different types of stakeholder and different levels of governance cooperate? What further measures are needed?

9.5 Main outputs and lessons learned

9.5.1 Knowledge level

Most participants felt that this was a pressing and important issue. Each of these green initiatives are already felt to have implications for housing access and inequality. However, there was not a common understanding of how this takes place (for instance, there was no common consensus about 'green gentrification'). The fragmented nature of different participants' views are likely to have been caused by the very different policy frameworks and methods of implementation for each of these green initiatives, as well as the different experience presented by each participant due to their different profiles and scale of governance / intervention.

Rather than presenting a coherent knowledge level about the interconnection between green initiatives and housing inequalities, each participant expressed an interest in the risk that these initiatives might affect housing inequalities more broadly, and a desire to learn more about the specific mechanisms whereby this might take place. This meant that the workshop really did function as a 'lab' where different stakeholders could share their own separate 'piece of the puzzle' and explore how their different perspectives might shed light on how housing access, affordability and inequality are impacted, when considered together.

9.5.2 Attitudes, policies, and other relevant outcomes, feeding into WP5

In each break out group, participants discussed the hypotheses put forward by UCL, either challenging these or providing greater detail for interrogating these hypotheses during WP5. Below, the responses to our preliminary details are summarised, as well as any new

hypotheses and additional insights that will feed directly into the empirical investigation for WP5.

For domestic retrofitting:

For retrofitting, the field experience challenged some of the preliminary hypotheses, while also providing greater detail for interrogating some hypotheses during WP5.

Preliminary hypothesis: Potential for rising rents within the social housing sector:

- Yes (as suggested by desk research in the case of Blackpool), although this may be offset by lower energy bills.

Preliminary hypothesis: The cost of private retrofit installation for the broader population remains extremely high:

- Yes, the costs of retrofit including more complex insulation measures, heat pumps, ventilation, and solar panels – and ‘whole house’ approaches which combine these measures – remain prohibitively expensive for most of the population, despite the universal heat pump subsidy and targeted grants for retrofit.

Preliminary hypothesis: There is some indication that good-quality retrofits can increase house values, and could lock certain groups out of retrofitted homes:

- Yes, although the effect is often relatively marginal. There is limited evidence that retrofit grant schemes are driving house prices rises. This is truer for affluent households who can afford comprehensive, architect-led retrofits with high-quality materials and installation. The number of self-funded ‘whole house’ retrofits remains very low. Grant schemes, which tend to fund less holistic retrofits, have a more limited effect.

Preliminary hypothesis: Area-based schemes (where whole streets or local areas can benefit from retrofit improvements) could lock certain groups out of these areas, if house prices are affected.

- Potentially. Area-based schemes tend to take a more comprehensive approach and improving multiple properties may magnify the effect on house prices. However, the deployment of area-based schemes remains extremely limited. The upcoming national Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme, which introduces area-based eligibility criteria, should provide more insight into the effects of area-based schemes on house prices.

Preliminary hypothesis: Those living in London, where house values are highest, may be more able to access retrofit mortgages.

- Yes, although green mortgages remain a nascent market and mainly function as loyalty schemes for lenders to retain existing borrowers. The interest rate and total borrowing cost of green mortgages are not the lowest on the market, so the incentive for homeowners to switch mortgage providers for a green mortgage is relatively weak.

In addition, new and revised hypotheses were drawn from the discussion:

New hypothesis: Despite government subsidies and grants, retrofit remains financially inaccessible to most households, with middle-income households ineligible for most support but unable to self-fund improvements.

New hypothesis: Energy supplier obligation schemes for lower-income households often result in retrofits, which are partial, poorly installed, and driven by cost-efficiency rather than quality, while affluent homeowners can procure comprehensive architect-led retrofits.

New hypothesis: Current retrofit policies systematically exclude properties with the most severe housing deficiencies (disrepair, damp, mould), leaving households in the poorest housing conditions without effective support.

New hypothesis: While retrofit policy is not yet reproducing housing market inequalities at scale, it is reproducing inequalities in housing provision.

- Retrofit policies exclude housing with disrepair, damp, and mould, locking households living in the worst conditions out of support schemes.
- The narrow and complex eligibility requirements of retrofit support schemes exclude many households in need.
- The universal support scheme (for heat pumps) only covers half the cost of installation, so more affluent households benefit disproportionately.
- Market-led support schemes prioritise cost efficiency over quality and appropriateness – with sometimes hazardous consequences – and provide little agency for households over the measures installed.

For NBS:

For NBS, the field experience did not challenge our preliminary hypotheses, but was able to provide greater detail for interrogating some of these hypotheses during WP5.

Preliminary hypothesis: Coordinating BNG both on- and off-site is a recent addition to affordable housing providers' costs – with the potential to affect affordable housing delivery.

- Yes, affordable housing providers face rising costs due to NBS provision through the new BNG legislation. Expanded in more detail below.

Preliminary hypothesis: Where developers design their BNG Plans with enhancing property values in mind, they may pursue a limited range of nature-based solutions (NBS), which may not provide the greatest natural or social value in newly developed areas.

- This hypotheses was not challenged and remains open to investigation.

Preliminary hypothesis: Choices around location may also channel economic, social and environmental benefits into the most expensive and desirable areas of mixed-tenure developments, entrenching inequalities.

- This hypotheses was not challenged and remains open to investigation.

Preliminary hypothesis: The different capacity constraints of local authorities in different parts of the country (who are responsible for coordinating provision of NBS through the creation of new Local Nature Recovery Strategies) could have implications for how NBS are rolled out in practice, through interactions with the developers engaged in these processes.

- Yes, local authorities have inconsistent capacities, and also are given responsibility for how Local Nature Recovery Strategies and BNG contributions should be coordinated in practice, leading to inconsistencies, complexities and additional costs for housing providers. Some additional implications of this are detailed below.

These hypotheses were strengthened and given more specific detail, which will help to interrogate them during WP5:

Additional insights: Rising costs for private and social housing providers

- In towns like Blackpool (a case study area for the UK case), BNG contributions for new development (a legal requirement in the UK) will be expensive, because the urban area is so dense and doesn't have the infrastructure required for NBS (e.g. filtration, soil, space).
- The new BNG regulations have increased the number and range of consultancies that housing providers (both social housing providers and private developers) need to pay, which also raises the costs associated with housing development. Consultants are employed for inter-alia, initial BNG assessments, landscape architects, and ongoing reporting.
- Multi-level governance: a disconnect was noted between central government and local authorities. While central government provides BNG requirements for new development and some guidance, it falls to local authorities to say how this should work in practice. This disconnect often manifests in the use of external consultancies to manage the relationship between central and local government. This disconnect can result in inconsistencies in the approaches of different local authorities, which also adds complexity, and additional costs, for housing providers (both private developers and social housing providers) working to provide housing in different authorities' areas.

Additional insights: Impacts of rising costs for provision of social / affordable homes

- Raises potential for reduced numbers of social homes in new developments, as private developers and housebuilders seek to offset the rising costs of BNG contributions by negotiating down their planning gain contributions (for social homes) through viability assessment negotiations with local authorities.

- While bigger private developers may be able to reduce their delivery of social homes on a given site, or get out of their BNG commitments on account of their rising costs, affordable housing providers are more regulated, and will not be able to circumvent their BNG requirements. This could produce an unequal playing field between different kinds of housing providers, in terms of their ability to negotiate rising costs.
- For social housing providers, BNG requirements increase their delivery and maintenance costs, and means getting a deliverable affordable housing scheme to work is harder.
- Biodiversity-rich sites may be less likely to be allocated for social homes, because they will be unviable for social housing providers.

Additional insights: Potential for green gentrification in areas identified for large-scale redevelopment:

- Central Blackpool is currently undergoing regeneration, which will leverage nature and increased social value to improve residents' quality of life but also levels of inward investment, tourism, and the town centre's general reputation. This regeneration will use NBS to improve the natural and social value of the centre, but will also require the demolition and removal of existing homes to make way for the NBS and better landscape architecture required. While there is potential for green gentrification in this area, funding from Homes England for the construction of new social housing will be crucial to mitigating inequalities.

For densification:

Preliminary hypothesis: Encourages the gentrification of areas designated for regeneration

- Not necessarily. Public sector participants do not regard densification/regen as a driver of gentrification in the latest regeneration programmes as targeting deprived areas. Some see the process as 'good gentrification' when the concentration of deprivation of the estate and surrounding area is very high, or when estate is not demolished (as in most recent regen programmes).
- YES regarding first generation densification, using public-private partnerships (e.g. Elephant and Castle), but local authorities are learning from past mistakes.

Preliminary hypothesis: Transfers the value inherent in public land (including social housing estates) to the private sector.

- YES, particularly in 1st generation regeneration (public-private partnerships) with the selling of public land to private developers and demolition of council estates. BUT, it seems that in the last decade such a transfer to the private sector is not so direct, with a change in the governance of the regeneration non-profit-private joint venture (2nd generation), and more GLA funds/loans for acquisition of land (to local authorities and non-profit housing providers), and changing approach to demolition of council estates.

Preliminary hypothesis: Limits the possibility of direct delivery of housing by local authorities.

- YES, due to how the planning system and housing supply system is organised. However, there are signs of growing direct delivery from LAs in recent years with introduction of council-owned regeneration companies and housing companies.

Preliminary hypothesis: Social housing delivery relies on cross-subsidy from private tenure production and results in a net decline in social homes.

- YES. **Section 106** is an issue: private sector does not ensure reaching affordable housing targets and of poor quality, so local authorities need vehicles to build better (like Council-owned Regeneration companies; BE1)
- But more recently there are signs of a paradigm shift in stopping the decline of social housing delivery (see above).

Preliminary hypothesis: Opportunities: various innovative programmes of the GLA intended to support local authority housing delivery.

- YES (see above paradigm shift)

Preliminary hypothesis: Opportunities: removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap in 2018 increased local authority access to finance, some have created 'local housing companies' for direct delivery.

- YES, signs of a shift towards new vehicles for local authority direct provision (see above paradigm shift), but it may be too early to see the benefit of lifting the borrowing cap, as local authorities still have difficulty in borrowing due to the high rise in interest rates (and high cost of construction).

These hypotheses were strengthened and given more specific detail, which will help to interrogate them during WP5:

Additional insights: issues with a lack of holistic long-term thinking, a joined-up approach, and transparency:

- Green interventions in densification have been beneficial in other ways (beyond their impact on affordability), as have provided more green space and more quality of built environment. However, densification has been kept separated from climate targets, and NBS is dealt separately to housing production.
- The UK is centralised in terms of finance; there are statutory obligations for social housing but with financial cuts there is little room for local authorities to manoeuvre for delivering social homes through regeneration
- Public fundings are small and short. Piecemeal and mismatch between public funding and timeframe for the spending the funding is an issue for local authorities and Social regeneration companies.

- Continuous change in policies discourages large developers, who want certainty. So, they sit on their hands. Meanwhile SMEs market for contractors (and developers) has been decimated.

Additional insights: the impact of crises

- Higher costly for Regeneration-Green interventions for private, public and non-profit sector, due to raised interest rates, rising construction costs, Brexit. Brexit in particular made procurement for construction more challenging.
- Housing associations do not want to take up Affordable Housing production (in regeneration) given increased cost of production and raised interest rates. The non-profit sector is changing: Housing Associations are getting larger by merging (London & Quadrant; Clarion; Genesis; Peabody merged with Catalyst Group) but some are having financial difficulties.

Additional insights: What we need to improve

- more holistic thinking about budget at national level for more long-term funding
- join-up thinking and join-up approach
- procurement
- longer term funding
- certification
- create criteria to 'measure' / data-driven. Planning system is precedent-led (things are reviewed because of objection and not set against measures/criteria).

9.6 Resources shared

The workshop was based on an introductory presentation by UCL summarizing the findings of D3.1 and, with reference to D4.1, outlining hypotheses about the potential impact of retrofitting, NBS and densification on housing inequalities.