

# The need for speed



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We need a construction acceleration to address the housing shortage. It's a sentiment we've heard in various member states in recent years. Each country seems to have its own version: a housing shortage or the poor quality of existing housing stock, often coupled with affordability issues due to poor energy quality. More new construction seems to be the solution, and we often hear this intention expressed by policymakers and politicians, driven by the relentless demand for housing. And it consistently fails. In recent years, problems with the energy infrastructure have compounded this. In several countries, led by the Netherlands, the existing electricity grid is overcrowded and unable to cope with the growing demand resulting from the energy transition. The switch from fossil fuels as the primary heat source for our homes to electric heat pumps and decentralized sustainable generation seems to have caught us by surprise. As a result, we're still building, but it seems like a drop in the bucket given the significant need for housing: for first-time buyers and tenants, for the elderly, and yes, for anyone else, really. Have you noticed? Once again, you're reading this with thoughts mainly about new construction. We unconsciously anticipate this. But there's more, especially within the existing building stock, where much remains possible. Moreover, we extend the use of buildings, which contributes enormously to limiting

material use. And when demolition is unavoidable, the site can be reused.

Take a fresh look at an area you think you know: your own neighbourhood, the industrial estate where your business is located. Such an existing building already has a grid connection, an access road, and also the rest of the infrastructure is basically in place. With a bit of luck, there's even public transport within walking distance. Here too, renovation will be necessary, but starting from scratch isn't necessary. Also, consider that renovation also boosts an area in a broader sense. More people mean more activity, and therefore support for all kinds of shops, businesses, activities and facilities. The transformation of inner-city industrial estates in many places across Europe proves that it can be done and that it yields significant results. While compelling examples can be found in almost all large and medium-sized cities, there are still buildings, neighbourhoods, and areas that seem to beg for improvement.

I fully realize that these are more challenging tasks than adding a small residential area in a meadow on the edge of a village or town. Although even that often encounters unexpected resistance, not least from people who already have a suitable roof over their heads. Smart and proactive involvement of current users and residents is a natural prerequisite for a successful process. We were also able to solve such issues during the first wave of urban renewal at the end of the last century. That experience still exists within institutions and companies.

So, can we solve the housing shortage by speeding up construction? Yes, but only if we look at it from a broader perspective than just new built. Transforming, subdividing, adding on, and renovating are certainly no less important, and when it comes down to it, at least as enjoyable to implement. ■

