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Urban Densification: Understanding landowners' inertia in building on vacant lots

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Abstract: Many municipalities promote urban densification in the interest of sustainable development and alleviating housing shortages. However, landowners as the key strategic actor for densification are still reluctant to build on their vacant lots. This inertia of the landowners in developing their land under their development rights is one of the main obstacles to the effective implementation of urban densification.

A more comprehensive understanding of the logics of the actions of landowners is necessary for the municipality to implement more effective densification policies. This article addresses this gap in knowledge by uncovering landowners' interests and behaviour. The research is based on a quantitative and qualitative research design with empirical evidence from Germany.

The study reveals the two most critical factors influencing landowner behaviour (acceptance of responsibility, and freedom of decision-making) and distinguishes five types of landowners. They differ in their interests and behaviour in dealing with their vacant lots.

Introduction

Many municipalities in Europe and beyond are promoting densification. This is considered an important solution to cope with the enormous demand for residential housing while containing urban sprawl (Teller 2021). Consequently, planning instruments have been discussed and adapted to make the development of inner-city areas more attractive than urban expansion (Buitelaar, Leinfelder 2020; Meijer, Jonkman 2020; Halleux et al. 2012). This solidification of densification as a planning goal shows the legal and political framework for densification (Hartmann, Jehling 2020).

Land policy strategies such as densification strategies aim to affect "the behaviour of social groups presumed to be at the root of [...] the collective problem to be resolved (target group)" (Knoepfel et al. 2007), applying different policy instruments (Gerber et al. 2018). The effective implementation of densification de-

mands a knowledge of the linkages between land use planning and property rights, as well as the interests of various strategic actors. The institutional framework and regime under which strategic actors operate impose the setting (North 1990). In particular, land use regulations and property rights affect densification. By interfering with the built environment, densification is confronted with complex structures of private ownership (Hartmann, Gerber 2018). Effective implementation of densification to solve the housing crisis thus concerns property rights.

Property rights with the right to use and dispose (Ostrom 1990) are strongly protected by law (Needham 2016). This protection leads to a higher degree of autonomy for the titleholders (Gerber et al. 2018). It can be derived from this premise that "[...] not the one building the flat, not the one owning the house, but the one who owns the land, decides the development of our cities" (Taesler quoted in Bernoulli 1946, translated). Therefore, the owners are the decision-making authority in dealing with the building land. Effective implementation of densification is hence highly dependent on landowners and limited by their individual objectives. Thus, landowners need to be addressed by public policy intervention to implement urban densification.

Most densification strategies cannot adequately address landowners and their property rights in resource scarcity. In practice, a prevalent and inherent assumption of municipal land policy is that property rights are predominantly an economic asset. Accordingly, landowners would strive for profit maximisation (Puustinen et al. 2022). Landowners should therefore exploit existing development potential by building on land granted development rights. Following this logic, no lots with building rights would remain un- or underused. However, empirical observations of unused building land in the existing urban realm seem to contradict this paradigm. For instance, there is still a considerable number of vacant lots in residential areas in German cities (Day 2000; Presse- und Informationsdienst der Bundesregierung 2022). This inertia of the owners of vacant lots in not building on their land under existing building

rights goes beyond the economic understanding of property rights. It remains unclear why landowners demonstrate such inert behaviour, seemingly not striving to maximise profit.

The existence of vacant lots indicates that the owners seem to follow something other than solely economic logics of action. Understanding logics of action can help to design better land policies to implement urban densification (Koloczek, Hengstermann 2020) as the logics of action form the basic framework on which individual behaviour is constructed (Dequech 2008). Landowners' motivation to densify their land is the manifestation of these logics of action in the concrete social situation. In other words, the behaviour of landowners is guided by their motivations, but the logics of action determine their behaviour. This insight is of relevance for planning practice. If it is not only known how landowners behave but more deeply, why they behave in this way, planning can implement densification more effectively.

Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the behaviour of landowners is needed. This study contributes to this gap in knowledge by exploring the logics of action of owners of vacant lots to improve the effective implementation of densification strategies. Specifically, we aim to give an explanatory approach by asking the question of why certain landowners do not build on their vacant lots. The research is based on a mixed-method research design with empirical evidence from Germany. Based on a Q-method, subjectively experienced logics of action of owners of vacant lots are revealed using a statistical factor analysis (Brown 1980). This enables the identification of the most critical factors that influence the behaviour of landowners. The findings are furthermore complemented by follow-up qualitative interviews carried out with the respondents of the Q-method. Thus, this study provides insight into the interests as well as the underlying logics of action of owners of vacant lots. With this knowledge, we contribute to more effective implementation of densification strategies in planning practice.

Theory of densification

To gain an insight into landowners' deep-rooted logics of action, a theoretical examination of the implications between land ownership and densification is needed. It is necessary to consider landowners' reactions to the implementation of densification and the possible interests

and motives affected by it. Furthermore, a socio-cultural approach is needed that helps to make the interests and motives identifiable and distinguishable. To gather this information, a mutual understanding of densification and a look at the current academic debate is helpful.

Broitman and Koomen (2015) define densification as a spatial process of an increase in inhabitants or dwellings in built-up areas. It is divided into soft and hard densification (Dembski et al. 2020; Touati-Morel 2015). Soft densification characterises the condensation of residential space by increasing the number of residential units in existing buildings. In contrast, hard densification describes the increase in building density. The second approach is considered to be the most effective way of creating housing, as hard densification appears to be suitable for countering urban housing pressure due to the high availability of land that can be quickly activated in an already built-up area. Hard densification can take a variety of forms, including the development of brownfields, replacement development, development at higher elevations and infill development (Bibby et al. 2020). This definition of densification in the sense of increasing the building density in an existing or buildable area with essentially the same type of use is the basis for the research presented here, as it is also the underlying political objective in Germany using different approaches of densification strategies (BBSR 2014: 7).

Densification can be understood as a "complex process with many components" (Jenks et al. 1996). The current academic debate revolves primarily around the advantages and disadvantages of densification (Angelo, Wachsmuth 2020; Claassens et al. 2020; Ahlfeldt, Pietrostefani 2019). There is also a focus on the way densification instruments and strategies work (Shahab et al. 2021; Debrunner, Hartmann 2020; Charmes, Keil 2015; Nabielek 2011) as well as how they affect planning (Meijer, Jonkman 2020; Touati-Morel 2015). In the planning implementation of densification, instrumental activism can be seen throughout Europe. This activism attempts to solve existing problems by introducing new land policy instruments (Shahab et al. 2021). Concentrating on the complex behaviour of important strategic actors in densification initiatives, this study seeks to counteract the academic and practical discussion that is predominantly oriented to the development or improvement of policy instruments.

Effectiveness in densification concerns the ability of the policy to achieve strategic densi-

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fication objectives in the built-up urban structure, facing private property rights (e.g., Muñoz Gielen et al. 2017; Hartmann, Spit 2015). Densification strategies primarily address public interests such as housing provision and environmental sustainability (Gerber et al. 2018). Accordingly, these strategies create a conflict of interest between landowners and municipalities. It is striking that landowners are involved in nearly every land policy conflict regarding densification (Herdt, Jonkman 2022). Therefore, landowners are “the root of the problem” (Knoepfel et al. 2007) and the target group to be addressed by densification strategies. With the implementation of densification strategies, the private interests of landowners are impacted. Landowners’ acceptance of the implementation thus determines whether the public interest is protected or enforced (Herdt, Jonkman 2022). Densification therefore requires a negotiation process between the private interests of the owners and the public interests through land policy.

The negotiation between the interests often results in NIMBYism. This term refers to the tension between planning interventions that pursue public interests and defensive reactions of residents who act upon their personal interests (Einstein et al. 2020; Hankinson 2018; Herdt, Jonkman 2022; Monkkonen, Manville 2019). NIMBYism is particularly associated with adjacent-use objections, which oppose projects that are implemented within a person’s own neighbourhood but may be approved elsewhere (Doberstein et al. 2016; Lewis, Baldassare 2010; Wicki, Kaufmann 2022). Research shows that most residents support densification projects in general, but they reject them the moment they hit their neighbourhood (Esaiasson 2014; Thornton, Knox 2006; Wicki, Kaufmann 2022; Wolsink 1994). This holds particularly true for neighbourhoods that do not have a high building density (Whittemore, BenDor 2019; Wicki, Kaufmann 2022). These implications are transferable to private landowners in peri-urban areas, as they are also residents in these areas. NIMBYism holds the ability to undermine the public interest in favour of the interests of affected individuals (Hankinson 2018). It is therefore extremely difficult to respond adequately through municipal interventions (Thornton, Knox 2006). Moreover, persons showing NIMBY behaviour align their expressed motivations with social values (Esaiasson 2014). In order to defend their resistance to a target, they conceal their genuine motivations for action beneath socially acceptable justifications.

This makes it challenging to confirm true motivations (ibid). The underlying interests of individual landowners are often covered up by the general rejection of densification in the neighbourhood through NIMBYism.

There is still a limited understanding of the underlying interests and motives of landowners. Most landowners with NIMBY behaviour argue that densification will affect their personal well-being as well as their neighbourhood negatively (Einstein et al. 2020; Herdt, Jonkman 2023; Monkkonen, Manville 2019; Wicki, Kaufmann 2022). They conceive of themselves as mere recipients of public policy. From a municipal point of view, landowners are considered homogeneous recipients of policy based on ideas of classical economics (Krabben, Needham 2008). It is assumed that the main motivation for landowners is of an economic nature (Puustinen et al. 2022). According to this rational understanding of classical economics, landowners would build on their vacant lots for individual economic growth. The mere allocation of land would ultimately lead to the availability of that land for building development.

However, studies on the acceptance of climate change policies, for instance, have demonstrated that place attachment is closely related to the acceptance of urban development projects and has impacts on the actions of landowners (Wicki, Kaufmann 2022; Devine-Wright, Howes 2010). Thus, the behaviour of landowners clearly seems to go beyond the traditional rational choice. Only a few inquiries conceive and explore plural perspectives of landowners (Adams et al. 2002; Adams, May 1991; Davy 2016; Geuting, Needham 2016). These illustrate, as was to be expected, that landowners do not always behave in ways that traditional rational choice, institutional systems, or behavioural economics suggest.

Empirical research regarding the response of landowners to development strategies indicates the plural perspectives of landowners. Different motives and circumstances of landowners lead to the consequence that they do not respond uniformly to strategies of development (Goodchild, Munton 1985: 9). Instead, the passiveness of landowners (Goodchild, Munton 1985) constrains the development process (Adams 1994). Various reasons for the retention of buildable land, such as speculation, protection, future purposes and investment, were identified, but this plurality in the behaviour is only considered academically regarding institutional landowners (Adams et al. 2002). Private landowners play a decisive role in the densifi-

cation of peri-urban areas and thus represent a previously underexplored aspect, which this study aims to approach.

Methodology

The empirical approach of this study is based on qualitative and quantitative methods. The first step is to classify the interests of the owners of land that has not yet been built on through secondary analysis. In addition, twenty-five owners of vacant lots, all individual private owners, were asked about their interests. Addressing private owners of land that has not yet been built on is difficult because of the lack of ownership transparency in Germany. Contact was made via the local authorities, which were only willing to address a small proportion of landowners. Therefore, this study was conducted in four German municipalities of different sizes, all of which have almost identical local characteristics in their peri-urban areas, allowing a direct comparison between them. In addition, there is a low degree of participation by the owners to participate in the study, with less than five per cent of contacted owners willing to participate. In the interviews, semi-structured questions are used to ensure the openness of the research and thus gain the necessary insights. The classification is a simplified compilation and conformance of the interests of landowners regarding their property mentioned by the literature and the interviewed persons. Double entries and weighting were not included in the classification of interests in the interviews to be able to make a descriptive addition to the interests available in the literature. Thus, the descriptive classification serves as an initial positivist simplification of the complex property relations.

To examine the behaviour of landowners of vacant lots regarding their property, a root cause analysis was carried out. This explicit examination of the owners' logics of action allowed the revelation of the motivations guiding their behaviour. The Q-method is a suitable method to conduct this behavioural research design and expound the behaviour (Brown 1980). Using thematically specific statements, the subjective point of view can be determined in a simple way. Douglas's (1999) Cultural Theory provides a methodological framework for conducting the Q-Method. This explanatory approach goes beyond purely economic modelling and traditional rational choice, looking at the intrinsic rationalities behind an argument.

The central assumption of it implies that every social situation can be described by four ideal-typical cultures, i.e., Fatalism, Hierarchism, Individualism and Egalitarianism (Hartmann, Jehling 2019; Davy 2016). From its own perspective, the action of the individual rationality is always rational and consistent (Thompson et al. 1999). The approach helps to understand and deal with the interests and motives of landowners in densification by taking a differentiated look at the subjective logics of action of landowners. The four so-called cultures are the basis for the construction of the Q-sample.

The Q-sample is further developed based on four elements. The elements are implied conclusively in terms of content from the application of the four cultures to the context of infill development and form the necessary link between theoretical and practical discourse. The first element is the willingness to take risks and describes the subjective significance of the risk that results from the development of the vacant lot (Hartmann 2012). The second element, the sense of responsibility towards society, looks at the extent to which owners see themselves as having responsibilities to society, e.g., the provision of necessary housing. As a third element, the willingness to make decisions reflects the degree to which other people influence one's own decisions. In addition, the thoughtfulness of decision-making with regard to the effects of development is considered. Finally, the attitude towards the institution of property forms the fourth element, as dealing with land results directly from the attitude towards property. There is an associated statement for all possible combinations of orientations and elements (cf. Table 1). The replication factor serves to validate the statements. 32 statements form the final Q-sample. Every possible combination exists twice. In this way, the consistency of categorisation by the participants can be checked (Uittenbroek et al. 2014).

The statements must all be classified and placed on a value-graded board by the respondents. This results in forced distribution. The prioritisation leads to differentiated subjective opinions. By weighing the statements, personal viewpoints can be deduced. The Q-sorts formed by the respondents are analysed with the help of the Kade programme (Banasick 2019). The Kade programme performs factor-based correlation analysis to evaluate the results statistically. By this means, commonalities and differences among the respondents can be identified (He et al. 2017). This analysis aims to classify the landowners into similar

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| direction | a) fatalism b) hierarchism c) individualism d) egalitarianism | n = 4 |
| elements | e) willingness to take risks f) sense of responsibility towards society g) willingness to make decisions h) attitude towards property | n = 4 |
| combinations | ae af ag ah ce cf cg eh be bf bg bh de df dg dh | n = 16 |
| replication | ae af ag ah ce cf cg eh be bf bg bh de df dg dh ae af ag ah ce cf cg eh be bf bg bh de df dg dh | n = 32 |
| Q-sample | (direction × elements) × replication = (4 × 4) × 2 = 32 statements | |

Tab. 1: Development of Q-Sample using directions and elements.

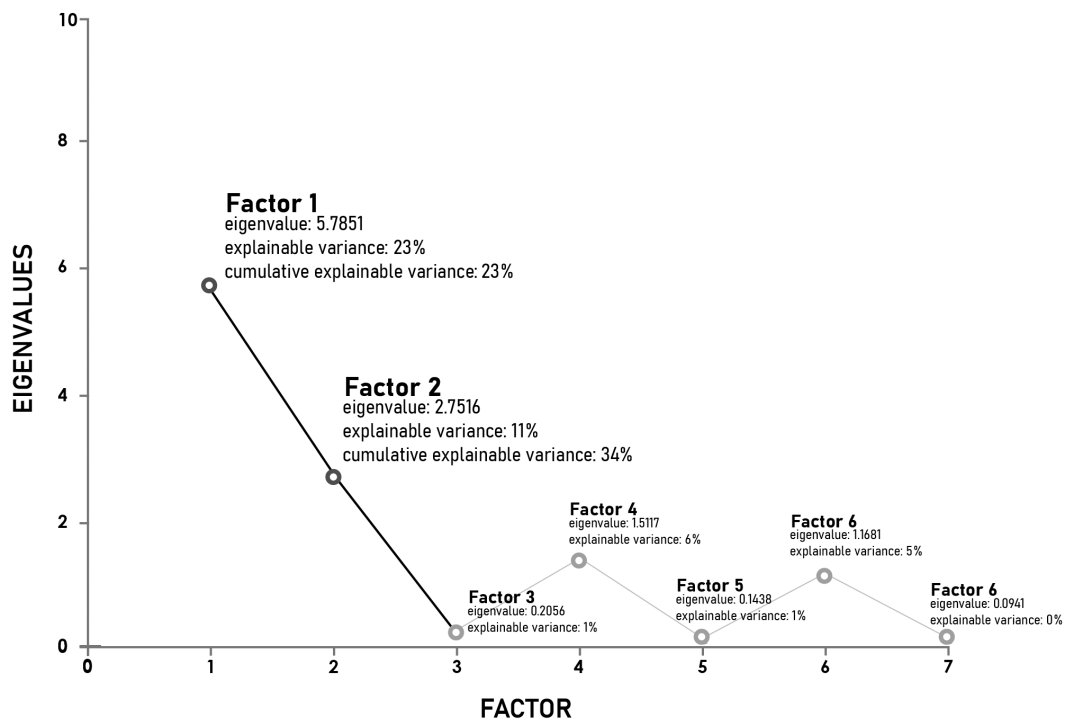


Fig. 1: Eigenvalues of the extracted factors through factor analysis. (Source: Own contribution elaborated by authors)

types based on their weighted Q-sorts in dealing with their vacant lots.

Firstly, factors that implicate the respondents' behaviour are extracted through the factor analysis. These are significant factors with a high eigenvalue. High eigenvalues indicate the importance of the factor for type formation.

According to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, all significant factors above 1 are selected (Guttman 1954) (cf. Figure 1). The two factors with the highest eigenvalues determine the evaluation matrix. A judgmental rotation defines the final matrix with the highest significant correlation between statement and factor interpreta-

tion (Brown 1980). Next, the participants are assigned to the two relevant factors based on their factor loading and their correlations with each other. These characteristics are transferred to an evaluation matrix, within which clusters of participants can be recognised and described by the factor characteristics. This means that the participants are assigned to a group with similar factor loadings for each of the two factors, which allows the contextual interpretation of the factors. For a more precise interpretation, the participants within the interval groups are then compared and analysed in relation to each other.

This interpretation reveals the definition of the factors themselves and therefore the logics of action of the different groups. The groups of participants determine the types of owners. Qualitatively collected information from follow-up interviews allows their further characterisation. The aim of the factor-based correlation analysis is therefore to categorise the participants into characteristic types based on their motives for making decisions when dealing with their vacant lot. Using this presentation of ideal types of landowners of vacant lots with their respective logics of action and the descriptive classification of interests, a sense of the plural behaviour of landowners can be created.

Results

The classification of the interests of owners of vacant lots investigated demonstrates various interests in dealing with their property. These interests are illustrated in Table 2. The inter-

ests can also occur jointly among the respondents. The classification of the interests focuses on giving a compilation of the various interests. A mutual weighting of the relevance of the respective interests was thus not carried out. The respondents pursue several interests of a financial nature. These include the perception of vacant lots as investment and provision for future purposes. Surprisingly though, the interest of financial added value, i.e., speculation, cannot be empirically proven in this research. In this point, the owners of vacant lots seem to oppose the behaviour thought to be rational in traditional economic understanding. The results show that the owners show emotional ties to or an environmental awareness of their properties, which significantly influences their behaviour and prevents the development of their vacant lots. In addition, the way they deal with the vacant lots is particularly orientated towards their individually perceived well-being. Some owners pursue special interests that are linked to future purposes. For instance, some respondents keep their vacant lots as a self-provision or provision for their family.

Owners' actions, however, cannot only be accounted for by their awareness of current interests. We must therefore comprehend the logic behind owners' behaviour to make municipalities able to act effectively. The statistical-interpretative evaluation via factor analysis by the Q-method reveals two relevant factors in the interpreted Q-sorts which illustrate the owners' logics of action. The first factor describes the owners' acceptance of responsibility. It shows the degree to which personal responsibility linked to the vacant lot is recognised and borne. The factor relates on the

| Interests in property | Description of interests |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Environmental awareness</i> | Avoidance of negative effects on the environment by not building |
| <i>Emotional ties</i> | Being kept from building due to emotional ties to the property |
| <i>Financial added value</i> | Achieving financial added value by speculating on an increase on the price of building land |
| <i>Financial investment</i> | Intention of financing a predefined future purpose |
| <i>Financial provision</i> | Possibility of financing undefined future purposes |
| <i>Own well-being</i> | Avoidance of being disturbed in one's own well-being because of the vacant lot being built on |
| <i>Provision for family</i> | Preservation of the possibility for family members to build in the future |
| <i>Self-provision</i> | Preservation of the possibility for oneself to build in the future |

Tab. 2: Interests of owners of vacant lots.

one hand to recognising the owners' own responsibility and on the other hand to the willingness to bear the resulting consequences of a decision for or against building on the property. The more positively this factor is loaded, the more owners of building plots recognise their own responsibility to solve the housing shortage by building on their plots. They show an understanding of the problem and consider the impact on others when taking action. The second factor describes the acceptance of restrictions on freedom of decision. It indicates the extent to which the owners react and respond to external influences on their individual freedom of decision-making. The more this factor is loaded negatively, the greater the extent to which owners reject any intervention from other people or institutions. They are entitled to make independent, autonomous decisions and are primarily concerned with their own advantage. Together, these two factors form the evaluation matrix below (cf. Figure 2).

The range per factor is -1.0 to 1.0 . Within this matrix, the owners are located based on their loadings on the factors. The owners are clustered into five types, depending on their factor loadings.

Type A: The self-interested autonomists

Based on the results of the Q-method, it is most important for the self-interested autonomists to make voluntary decisions about the building development on their vacant lots. They reject any restriction of personal property freedom. Instead, they only consider their personal benefit. The self-interested autonomists only take responsibility for the consequences that affect themselves directly. Hence, they do not take any responsibility towards contributing to minimising the housing shortage. From their point of view, their own decision-making power applies without exception. Consequently, the self-interested autonomists

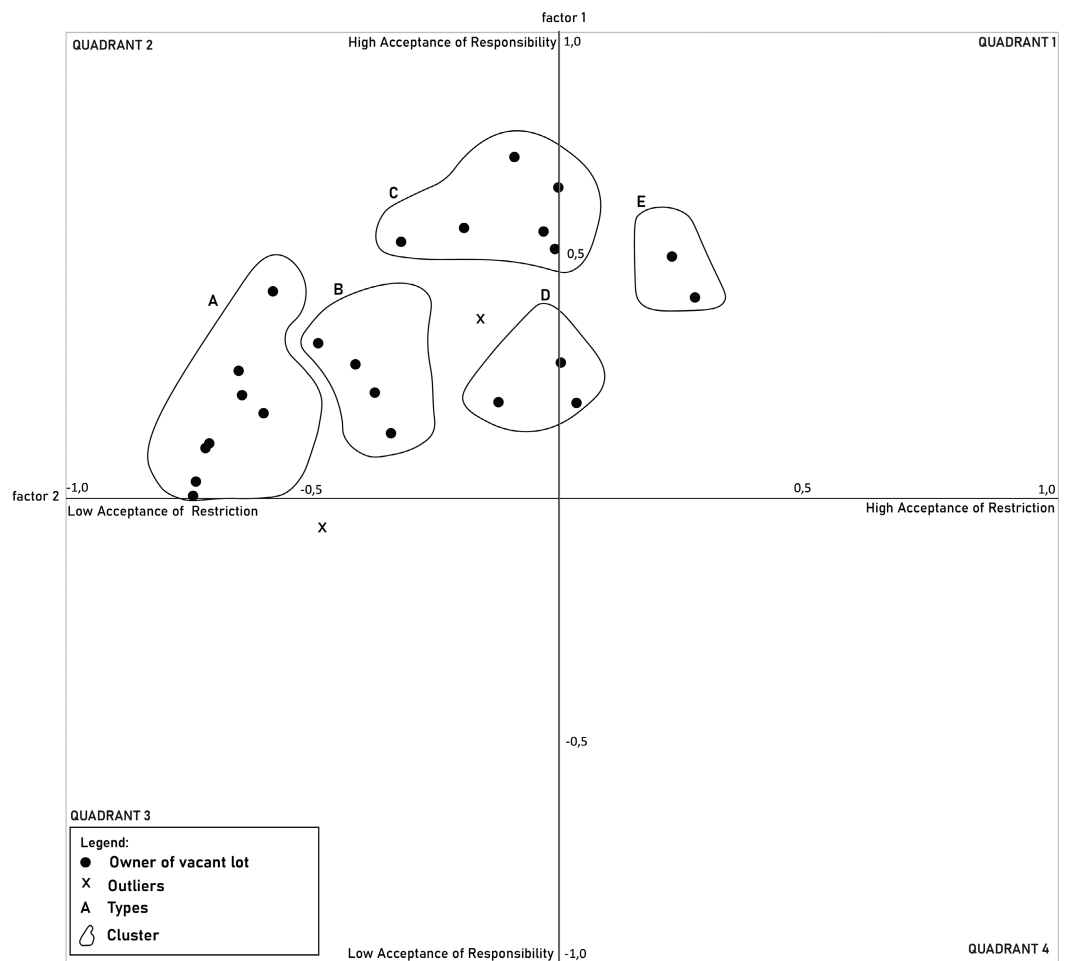


Fig. 2: Evaluation matrix with types of landowners of vacant lots. (Source: Own contribution elaborated by authors)

reject the institution of the municipality. They know that they can assert themselves against the municipality if the municipality curtails their freedom of ownership. In this regard, one responding owner emphasises in response to a hypothetical building obligation that the owner “will of course try everything to squeeze the municipality somewhere” (Respondent 1). The empirical findings point out that the self-interested autonomists do not build on their vacant lots because they cannot increase their benefit in this way.

Type B: The irresponsible self-determinists

Irresponsible self-determinists make free and individual decisions. As they recognise that property is an obligation that exceeds the individual, they consider the interests and opinions of their social environment. From their angle, however, individual benefit is most important. Nonetheless, the neighbourhood should not be ignored, because, according to one responding owner, that would only create problems. Simultaneously, the irresponsible self-determinists do not see themselves as part of the solution to the housing shortage, as the Q-method identified. As a responding owner puts it: “The creation of necessary housing [is] a municipal matter” (Respondent 2). In this respect, the owners see the municipality as justified in its function. However, they reject regulations and restrictions on their individual rights. Their vacant lots have not yet been built on because they do not benefit from such development.

Type C: The responsible neighbours

From the perspective of responsible neighbours, property has a function for everyone. Therefore, they explicitly take responsibility to contribute to solving the housing shortage as the empirical results show. The responsible neighbours make their decisions prudently concerning their neighbourhood. All possible effects of their actions are taken into consideration. Negative impacts are avoided. Thus, the neighbourhood has a considerable influence on their decision-making. However, the responsible neighbours do not relinquish their decision-making competence. In this regard, the owners recognise the authority of the municipality, but they reject the exercise of coercion. They will only build on their vacant lots if there is a benefit for themselves, just as much as for their neighbourhood.

Type D: The conserving deniers

Generally, the conserving deniers recognise their own responsibility to contribute to solving the housing shortage. They emphasise that all owners of vacant lots share this responsibility equally. Yet, the problem of housing shortage does not affect them in their social environment for which the conserving deniers assume far-reaching responsibility. Although they decide for themselves, they are largely guided by the interests and opinions of their neighbourhood. The neighbourhood should not be affected negatively by a development any more than they should. This behaviour is reflected in the reaction to municipal action. The conserving deniers accept municipal action even if they do not favour it. Nonetheless, it does not encourage them to build on their vacant lots. The conserving deniers will only do so if they see a corresponding necessity in their neighbourhood.

Type E: The welfare-oriented owners

The welfare-oriented owners take full responsibility for the use of their vacant lots as well as for the consequences of their actions. From their point of view, all owners of vacant lots are obliged to contribute to the solution of the housing shortage. They are also willing to make this contribution themselves. Accordingly, one owner clearly states: “I want to build” (Respondent 3). For the welfare-oriented owners, the welfare of society as a whole is decisive. Ultimately, they decide on the use of their vacant lots. However, the interests and opinions they recognise in society explicitly guide them. Consequently, from the owners’ perspective, municipal action is meaningful. In dealing with vacant lots, the municipality should provide the necessary regulations as long as they are legitimate. Yet, they reject strict regulations, as they prefer the municipality to enter into dialogue with them. The welfare-oriented owners are therefore open to building on their vacant lots if they are involved accordingly.

The description of the five types of owners of vacant lots based on the Q-method shows a different behaviour regarding the respective logics of action. These logics of action are not in all aspects distinguishable from one another. Remarkably, all five types see themselves as responsible for the provision of housing as landowners to some extent. The strong rejection of the restriction of freedom of decision by exter-

nal circumstances, though, prevents the building on vacant lots.

Discussion

The interests and logics of action of private landowners identified in this research show that one's environment plays a decisive role in dealing with land. Densification is often discussed within the inner-city context. However, empirical work on spatial allocation of densification shows that densification projects are primarily carried out in lower-density residential housing areas in suburbia (Jehling et al. 2020). This research follows the trend to broaden the spatial perspective and examine it throughout different settlements and neighbourhood types (e.g., Charmes, Keil 2015; Rousseau 2015; Touati-Morel 2015). The results of this study show that private landowners in peri-urban areas show an inertia to build on their vacant lot and therefore reject the densification of the neighbourhood they live in. These findings are supported by other empirical research indicating that residents in denser neighbourhoods are more likely to accept local densification strategies (Wicki, Kaufmann 2022). Accordingly, the spatial distribution of densification plays a relevant role in the effective implementation of densification.

Considering landowners' inertia regarding densification strategies as a solely NIMBY question is not far-reaching enough, because the genuine motivations are often concealed beneath socially acceptable justifications (Esaiasson 2014). This research uncovers these hidden motivations to some extent with the help of the logics of action and the interests of landowners. The factors and their factor loadings form quadrants through the matrix (cf. Figure 2), which indicate the differences in the logics of action. It appears from the data that the second factor is decisive for the activation of the owners since most of the owners studied reject any restriction of their freedom of decision (Quadrant 2). Landowners in the third quadrant who, as indicated in the matrix, also prefer a high level of freedom in decision-making, additionally possess a low sense of responsibility towards society. This lack of responsibility implies that these landowners have an unalterable perception of the protection of their property rights. In this regard, the conflict between the public interest in providing necessary housing and the interest in protecting private property rights from public intervention has become a

relevant issue. The protection of private property, therefore, hinders effective intervention for densification.

Finding the right balance between different legitimate interests of land use seems to be the way to succeed in planning (Davy 2016). The strong dominance of the second factor (i.e., the acceptance of restrictions on freedom of decision) regarding the vacant lots points to strong private property rights. Most municipal strategies for implementing densification seem to be based on supply-oriented, cooperative, or consensus-oriented approaches instead of responding to the owners' logics of action. This might explain why the implementation of densification is still in its infancy in many municipalities. This study points to the need for empirical evidence of the match and impact between municipal strategies, such as three-fold inner development and the logics of action of landowners. Consequently, it is necessary to also explore intervention-intensive instruments in the strategies, especially as a response to owners who do not want their decision-making freedom to be constrained by sovereign restrictions and who do not recognise the social obligation that comes with their property title by German law.

Decisions on effective densification are ultimately political in nature. It is necessary to recognise the significance of political power dynamics, as densification strategies are implemented by individual decision-makers in municipal administrations (Shahab et al. 2021). However, political decision-makers cannot be regarded as value-neutral (Tewdwr-Jones 1995). Through so-called framing, subjective aspects, such as values and interests, are inherently integrated into decision-making processes (Rein, Schön 1993). The final decisions on the corresponding application are made by politicians led by far-sighted influencing factors that transcend the field of planning. The prevailing political balance of power in a municipality and the resulting decisions have an enormous influence on the feasibility and implementation of densification. Accordingly, densification is indeed a "complex process with many components" (Jenks et al. 1996).

Conclusion

Effective implementation of densification is dependent on landowners' actions. An in-depth understanding of their interests is inevitable. In this research, we were able to show

that landowners, in the context of densification, do not correspond to behaviour that traditional rational choice and behavioural economics suggest. Instead, our findings indicate that the interests of landowners are broad and diverse and that social interests such as family provision, emotional ties or one's own well-being must also be considered when dealing with the land.

Nevertheless, the interests of landowners concerning densification are often still opaque for municipalities. The interests represent an individual characteristic that necessarily differs for each landowner. Moreover, interests are purely descriptive and therefore do not determine decision-making. More intrinsic circumstances such as the underlying logics of action of landowners provide a deeper and more understandable insight. By applying the Q-method, five types were identified that differ in their subjectively experienced logics of action when dealing with the vacant plot of land. The self-interested autonomists and the irresponsible self-determinists do not want to be restricted in their freedom of choice. They have high expectations regarding the protection of private property. In contrast, the responsible neighbours and the conserving deniers demonstrate responsibility towards their respective neighbourhoods but do not react to municipal strategies. The last type, consisting of the welfare-oriented owners, is the only type that would react to densification strategies by building on their vacant lot. With regard to the five types, the results of this study show that plural perspectives for private landowners do emerge from the empirical evidence.

The knowledge of interests and logics of action of landowners makes a relevant contribution to the reasons that prevent effective implementation of densification strategies. However, it is difficult for policymakers to identify and specifically address the individual interests of landowners within their strategies to increase their effectiveness. Yet, both the spatial and institutional framework affecting every planning and land policy intervention must not be neglected. The former requires consideration of densification in both urban and suburban contexts. The latter suggests that the values and interests in planning departments, as well as of political decision-makers, play a crucial role. The scientific research of these aspects goes beyond the scope of the current paper's objectives. Nonetheless, we recommend that future research on the individual impact of planners and policymakers, as well as the spatial context,

would be useful and worthwhile for further debates about densification.

The contribution of this research to the academic debate about densification is an understanding of the complexity of property relations in a built-up area. Landowners are not a homogeneous group and their plurality needs to be recognised accordingly. This recognition of plurality at the level of planning can succeed if the municipality considers the landowners' logic of action in its densification strategies. Landowners are the key to the effective implementation of densification strategies since they are the target group involved in all aspects of it. Therefore, understanding the logics of action of landowners is inevitable in order to effectively promote densification. The plurality of occurring logics of action of landowners requires correspondingly plural orientations of densification strategies. In both the political and the planning context, it should not only be a matter of discussing and adapting planning instruments for densification. Landowners and property rights should rather be considered a crucial part of policymaking. Only by these means can densification play its part in solving the dilemma between housing provision and containing urban sprawl.

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