

# Austrian Urban Fieldsite

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## Location of the fieldsite

The Austrian urban field site is situated within Vienna, the capital of Austria. It is a single elongated residential building called Karl-Marx-Hof (KMH), built in the late 1920s and stretching for 1.2 km. It is one of the most famous municipal housing complexes in Vienna, situated at the margins of an affluent neighborhood. It was built during the "Red Vienna" era (1919-1934), when affordable housing for workers was to be realized within a communal setting.

Today the dwelling environment of the KMH is perceived to be anonymous; while the architectural features of the building (enclosed courtyards etc.) seem to enable social control. Mutual help among neighbors is also experienced differently by various groups of interviewees. While most tenants do not report high levels of mutual help, outsiders providing social services (e.g., nurses or home care workers) observe that neighborly help is more pronounced than in comparable municipal housing complexes.

## Social Relations and Distance

Obviously, only a small part of the social relations of the KMH tenants take place within the building itself. Networks based on kinship and friendship, as well as on workplace relations, reach far beyond the KMH. The extent of



Different generations are together (photo: Jörg Leiner)



Playground in the Courtyard (photo: Gabriele Steurer)



Sisters telling their life-story (photo: Elisabeth Strasser)



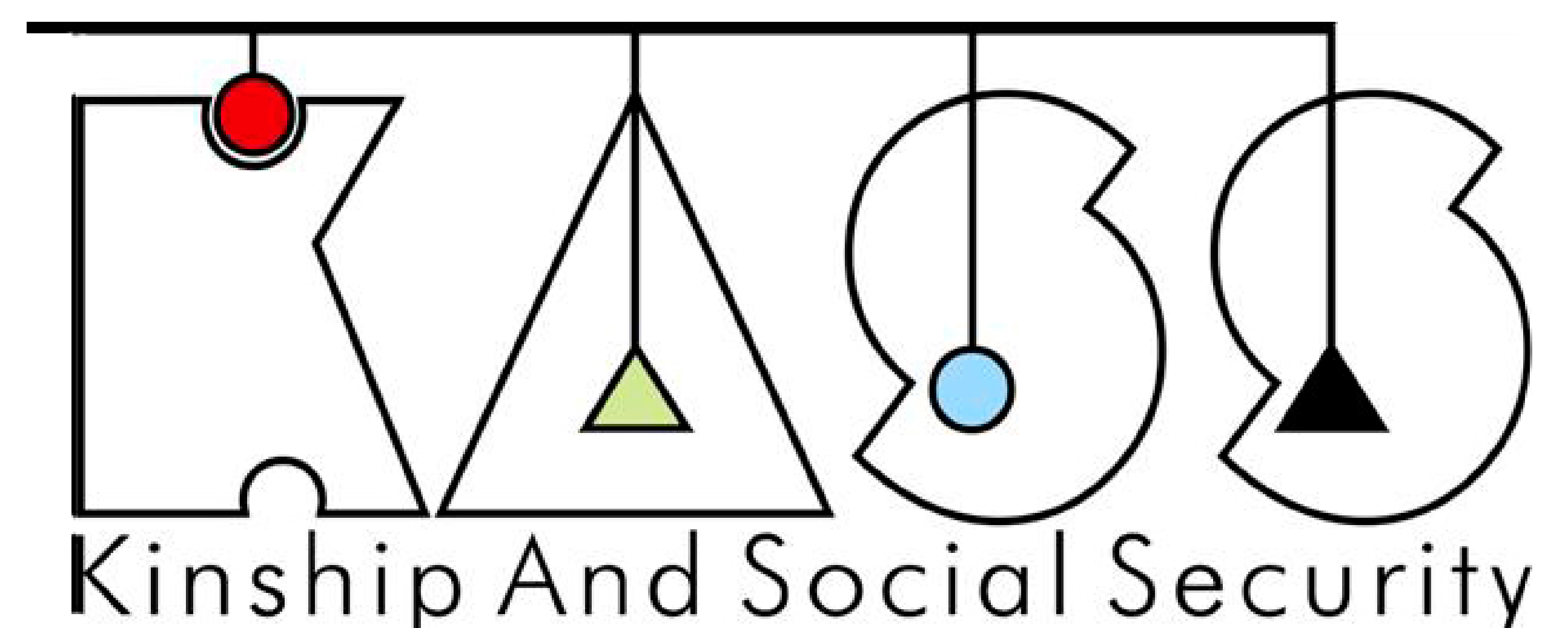
mutual aid among relatives is comparatively small, primarily limited to members of the nuclear family. This is also evident from the KNQ sample, with an average size of kinship network of 60 people (ranging from 16 to 149 named kin and important others). Even the close relatives rarely live in the KMH or nearby but are scattered over different parts of Vienna, other parts of Austria, or live outside of Austria.

## Individualization

The KMH is characterized by a relatively large share of single mothers and women participating in the wage economy. The fertility is low compared to rural areas of Austria but not unusual within the context of Vienna. Inhabitants of the KMH widely use institutional assistance, especially for child care and assistance for the elderly and sick. Thereby, the individualization of social relations is further reinforced, since it is not essential for individuals to invest into relations beyond their immediate family.

## Kinship over the Life Cycle

Attitudes towards family and kinship change in the course of the life-cycle. For example, having children often increases the roles of parents and grandparents, both in emotional and practical terms. Although relations to "important others" are much valued by many people throughout their lives, care for the elderly is expected exclusively from kin and institutional providers: friends are neither expected to be supportive nor even asked for help in such a situation.



An interdisciplinary project with an anthropological agenda funded by the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme.

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Layout: Kristin Magnucki, Oliver Wehmann  
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