



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy measure fact sheet

Germany

Hausakte (“Building folder”)

Thematic Objective 1

September 2016

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Implementing body: | Federal Ministry of Transport, Construction and Housing |
| Key features & objectives: | Improving the filing of building related documents and information at the planning, construction, operation and contractual stages, the building folder enhances consumer access to housing quality and transparency of the housing market. |
| Implementation date: | 2001 |
| Targeted beneficiaries: | Home owners of residential buildings |
| Targeted sub-sectors: | Residential housing |
| Budget (EUR): | €66,300 (for the digital building file grant project) |

In a nutshell

Around the turn of the 21st century, Germans paid a high price to purchase a home, particularly in urban areas. Compared to their European peers, they paid on average double the price in proportion to their income.¹ While the average number of buildings constructed from 1% of most countries' GDP amounted to 2.5-3.5 per 1000 inhabitants, the same only created 1.5 homes per 1000 inhabitants in Germany.²

With a share of 50% in the total home buying costs, the construction of a building in Germany bears significant cost saving potentials.³ In 2001 the German Ministry of Transport, Construction and Housing launched the “cost-effective, quality-conscious building” initiative to raise awareness on available processes and tools providing quality housing at affordable costs.

The federal “building folder” (“Hausakte”) was introduced as one of the main initiatives under the “cost-effective, quality-conscious building” initiative umbrella in late 2001. Targeting single family homes, the use of the building folder – at the time a haptic, ring binder with various sections – was voluntary. Its purpose was to enhance consumer access to housing quality and increase the

transparency of the housing market as a whole. In practice, the folder is a means to standardise the filing of building related documents and information. Covering the entire documentation at the planning, construction, operation and contractual stages, it seeks to capture the entire history of a building. Next to the “haptic” version of the building file, a digital version was developed through a project grant of the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Housing in 2004-2005.

General description

The “cost-effective, quality-conscious building” initiative was launched by then Federal Minister of Transport, Construction and Housing Kurt Bodewig. The initiative was founded on a common declaration⁴ supported by 26 different federations including building, architect, housing, banking and real estate sectors. The signatories of the declaration agreed to drive forward and develop environmentally friendly, innovative and affordable building in the future. The initiative established an office located in the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR).⁵ This office also served as a competence centre in order to prepare, centralise and disseminate information to all parties involved in the German construction sector.

Together the parties involved in the initiative launched the “building folder” at the end of 2001. Essentially, the building folder contains two distinct parts: (1) the Building Certificate and (2) the “House Document”.

The “Building Certificate” is a collection of documents created during the construction process containing the following kind of information:

- Location, living space, etc.;
- Description of building construction and individual components, e.g. rain water use, renewable energy, waste management facilities, insulation details
- Details on finishing building materials, e.g. floor coverings, tiles
- Description of technical equipment e.g. heating and cooling, telecommunications, electric equipment

- Energy Performance Certificate
- Official documentation, e.g. building plan
- Index of companies involved in planning and extension
- Acceptance reports, tests and warranty periods

Meanwhile, the “House Document” contains data collected during the building’s use including the following type of documentation:

- Inspection and servicing reports;
- Operational costs, e.g. property taxes, insurances, inspection and maintenance of building and technical equipment, costs of utilities, etc.;
- Maintenance / modernisation / renovation works carried out;
- Photo documentation;
- Contractual documentation.

In 2004 the digital version of the building folder was developed by means of a project grant. The digital building folder provides building owners with a digital structure to document, organise and examine information on the planning, construction and use of the building. It contains the following 6 modules:

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Module 1: | Characteristics |
| Module 2: | Description |
| Module 3: | Address |
| Module 4: | Summary tables |
| Module 5: | Documents, drawings, calculations, descriptions, photos; |
| Module 6: | Documents, proposals, contracts. |

Given its positive contribution to the sustainability and value added of buildings, the digital building folder was edited by the Federal German Chamber of Architects. The digital folder was available for download under the domain www.digitale-hausakte.de against a low nominal fee.

Achieved or expected results

Neither the building folder, nor the overarching initiative was subject to a formal evaluation report. However, the overarching initiative was clearly initiated as a long-term project. Within only half a year the Ministry achieved to extend the number of signatories from 12 to 21, with 26 finally signing the declaration. This increase of organizations joining the initiative shows wide interest of a range of different organizations.

The long-term orientation of the initiative is also reflected in the building of institutional structures of the competence centre whose role was to steer the initiative. Around eight months after the launch of the initiative, data on the use of the competence centre indicated active use of the institution’s web portal. An average of around 200 persons visited the web portal between October 2001 and June 2002.⁶

After its introduction in 2001, interest in the hardcopy of the building folder was announced to be considerable by the Ministry. Within half a year more than 3000 copies were created, although only one copy was officially handed over, according to the Ministry.⁷ Until mid-2005, around 3500 hard copies were obtained from the Ministry’s own edition. Meanwhile, approximately 20,000 downloads were made from the competence centre.⁸

With the end of the 16th parliamentary term in December 2009 the “cost-effective, quality-conscious building” initiative was discontinued after a duration of 10 years through an official letter from the Ministry. However, the digital building folder was still available up until 2012.

Table 1: Number of building folder copies obtained

| Total number of building folder copies | 23,500 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Downloads of haptic version through the competence centre | 20,000 |
| Hard copy edition mailings | 3500 |

Source: BBR information exchange

Perspectives and lessons learned

From a **government perspective**, the launch of the building folder was long overdue being discussed for more than 30 years before its introduction in 2001.⁹ According to the Ministry, the main achievement of the building file lies in facilitating the qualitative comparison of different residential buildings. Thus, market transparency and consumer protection were successfully promoted.¹⁰

The overarching initiative “cost-effective, quality-conscious building” was equally regarded as a success.¹¹ Why the building folder was discontinued around 2-3 years after the official close of the overarching initiative could not be answered by the Ministry.

From the **perspective of the German Federation of Prefabricated Construction (BDF)**,¹² the building folder did not live up to its expectations.¹³ However, the ministry’s building folder served as one of several foundations to develop BDF’s proprietary building file¹⁴ which was elaborated as a practice-oriented solution for prefabricated construction members.¹⁵ Comprising the entire life-cycle of a building, the folder can, if kept up-to-date proactively by building owners, serve as a quality criterion for building owners.¹⁶ The folder is a documentation system indicating the planning, building and modernisation measures realised after the construction of the prefabricated building. BDF’s building folder will be provided in printed as well as digital form.

From the **perspective of the Association of Private Builders and Home Owners (VPB)**,¹⁷ the building folder shows that despite the advantages of keeping building related files neatly organised, insights into construction related processes were

insufficient. Given the building folder's developers' focus on selling a product, the result of the building folder was too static and too far away from the reality of private builders.¹⁸

The VPB provides of experiences with a proprietary building folder developed particularly for private builders. This folder has proven to be useful because it is closer to the reality of private builders. According to the VPB, around 90% of all home builders build ready for occupancy without independent architects and therefore have no independent trustees of their interests.¹⁹ The building folder of VPB was also developed in digital form.

From the **perspective of BFW, the German Association for Private Housing and Real Estate Companies**,²⁰ the building file is merely the result of a research project commissioned by the German government not imposing any obligation on building owners. According to BFW, the proposed building file of the Ministry has not achieved statistical relevance in terms of its application in practice.²¹

Efforts to re-introduce the building file as a mandatory requirement would be met with resistance by concerned stakeholders. In BFW's view, making the hand-over of certain building documentation mandatory by law would be preferred. Rather than complying with a specific template, this would avoid an additional bureaucratic burden on construction companies.²²

From the **perspective of the German Architecture Chamber (BAK)**,²³ the main value of the building folder also lies in providing building owners of single family houses assistance in collecting building related documentation. Due to changes of the procedure for building permits, the collection of planning, static and basic building data became a recommended task for building owners. According to the BAK, the reason why the building folder is hardly used today lies in the termination of the governmental initiative. With the change of government in 2009, the chance to advertise the building folder and maintain its digital version was no longer available. Nevertheless, the structure and a majority of its contents remain relevant today. The BAK would hence see considerable value, if the building folder was revived in its digital format.

Thomas Lützkendorf from the **Karlsruhe Institute of Technology** sees the driving force behind the building folder coming from consumer protection concerns. According to him, the key beneficiaries of a revised building folder would be property valuation experts. Given their task to develop technical reports to assess the market value of a building, the building file facilitates the collection of all technical building documentation is invaluable for them.²⁴

Endnotes

- 1 <http://bauinfo24.de/thema~folder~1~letter~E~branche~434~news~626~print~on.asp>
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Ibid
- 4 [http://www.bakcms.de/Portals/_Rainbow/infomaterial/595-O/Druckvorlage_Gemeinsame_Erklaerung\(1\).pdf](http://www.bakcms.de/Portals/_Rainbow/infomaterial/595-O/Druckvorlage_Gemeinsame_Erklaerung(1).pdf)
- 5 In German: Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR) located in the building of the Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBR).
- 6 <http://www.rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/neuss/scheckheft-belegt-die-hausgeschichte-aid-1.146599>
- 7 Ibid
- 8 According to information exchange with the BBR, August 11th 2016.
- 9 <http://www.rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/neuss/scheck heft-belegt-die-hausgeschichte-aid-1.146599>
- 10 Ibid
- 11 https://www.vhw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/07_presse/PDFs/Archiv/PDFs_2002/39.pdf
- 12 In German: Bundesverband Deutscher Fertigbau, e.V. (BDF)
- 13 According to information exchange through phone and e-mail correspondence with BDF, September 8th 2016.
- 14 Titled "Hausakte Deutsche Fertighausindustrie (BDF)".
- 15 <http://www.fertigbau.de/news/651/fertigbau-branchen-staerkt-nachhaltigkeits--gedanken.html>
- 16 Ibid
- 17 In German: Verband Privater Bauherren (VPB) e.V.
- 18 Interview with representative from VPB 31.08.2016
- 19 Interview with representative from VPB 31.08.2016
- 20 In German: Bundesverband Freier Immobilien- und Wohnungsunternehmen e.V.
- 21 Information obtained through e-mail exchange from BFW 22.08.2016
- 22 Phone enquiry with representative of BFW 22.08.2016
- 23 In German: Bundesarchitektenkammer (BAK)
- 24 Phone enquiry 23.08.2016