

## Heimo Scheuch Podcast – Episode 26

Transcript

Can social housing be sustainable & affordable?

May 2023

### 00:00:04 Heimo Scheuch

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my podcast. I'm Heimo Scheuch, the CEO of Wienerberger. And today I have a great pleasure to have a guest with me who actually comes from India but lives now in Berlin. And it's always fascinating to talk to Mrs Kundoo, when we talk about cultural differences between Europe and India, which we will do in a minute, and obviously her experience with us Europeans when we talk about building and social housing. Thank you for being here!

### 00:00:35 Anupama Kundoo

Thank you so much for having me!

### 00:00:38 Heimo Scheuch

You are actually work and live mostly in India and since a couple of years are based here in, in the heart of Europe, in Berlin and you see the the the current developments in Europe, obviously when we talk about not only sustainability but housing, access to housing, the climate change, all these discussions that are very, very strongly led in Germany right now. What do you really feel as an Indian? With your background and completely different challenges that your home country faces that is growing and has now by the way, surpassed China with respect to population and soon will become probably the third biggest world economy.

### 00:01:24 Anupama Kundoo

Hmm, so many questions. I don't know where to start from, but you said how do I feel as an Indian? Dot dot dot. So I would say as an Indian, what I first of all feel is that we are more common than different. However different we may appear, these are very superficial differences. I have always seen human race, the homo sapiens, as one. They they are. It's not just my perspective, but sometimes we all live in our own imagined realities. So I found in the western world that there is a tendency to focus on the difference, than on the common and I personally feel a lot of contemporary problems has to do with the attitude of how we look at a thing, or even how we look at a problem. Or sometimes we manufacture problem so that we have something to do, you know.

### 00:02:24 Heimo Scheuch

That's a very interesting thought, by the way. Sorry to interrupt you, but it's it's actually fascinating what you say because in the current discussions that we have in Europe, especially with respect to a lot of challenges in the world, politically, culturally financially, you are absolutely right. We focus on the differences. Yeah. And we try to focus on our issues, problems or whatever you call them and neglect that there are other people around the world who have the same, basically because climate is something which we all have to face.

### 00:02:58 Anupama Kundoo

Well, all have to face but we have not all equally created it. Some people we know who have created, who have contributed much more to the creation of the problem than to the solution. And whenever we give them solutions of which most solutions have to do with reflecting on how humans poise and posture themselves in the environment, not only in the environment. Nowadays, people think environment is something external to us, as if it's just some external thing like a planet or a or a material. Everything outside of us, but even there we here I see the perspective is to think about problems external

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to ourselves, and therefore whenever a solution or a when there's a brainstorming and it comes to reflecting about us, our lifestyle, immediately they say things like, "Ach, wir sind ja in Deutschland.." and stuff like that. So what does that actually mean? Does it mean? What does that sentence mean? I went around asking a lot of people. We are in our comfort zone. Let's solve every problem with another technology or with another gadget or another, something. Let's now. Instead of buying, you know, the latest fashionable thing, let's buy a slightly 10% reduced energy version of that thing. So my question is, what's the point I have asked myself, you know, since I've been coming to Europe. What's the point of doing efficiently? Well, things that need not be done at all. But sometimes we forget that.

### 00:05:20 Heimo Scheuch

So I think from your perspective, when you say differences are made-up by people, we all face the same challenge and to really create housing of the future, it is to really think the, the putting the, the necessity of social housing through who is financing it, who should be doing it, how should it look like and what sort of basic instruments we should provide the people for in order to get this?

### 00:05:50 Anupama Kundoo

Yeah, I think just like housing, many of the shortages, including the energy crunch and everything it has to do with the way humans manage resources and in resources it also land, is included. Whether you can own land or not, whether the city is providing you housing or just. Is it a free market for developers and or is it a mixture of both that the city provides 0 housing at a certain cost? And the developers will somehow will it will, it will balance itself out if both operate, so there are so many factors that work. But when I would look at, because you made the distinction between the developed countries and the developing countries, it is, it was very interesting for me to note when I first came here, that the shortage of housing is not just a problem that we thought we had due to a simplified idea of affordability that we had. But when you look at the same problem, whether you're in New York, whether you're in Denmark, everywhere, so then when you come down to those layers, there are, I've, I've found that there are. You can group the problems into these categories. One of them is, in the in the in the case of India, it's about how people after working 8 hours or 10 hours a day, the wage is does not reflect all their needs from medical needs to education, school and housing. So in India there has been a transition. Which is due to urbanization and rapid urbanization. So what happens is, instead of having their ancestral homes or plots in their villages, people are moving to a...

### 00:07:44 Heimo Scheuch

to a city..

### 00:07:44 Anupama Kundoo

Everybody's moving due to the economic drivers, which, by the way, have not to do with only India because everyone's producing their things in India. They want their offices in those standards, air conditioned, whatever. So there is on one hand, suddenly too much of a demand, too short a time to supply it, the wage not reflecting the..all needs and the fact that the globalisation related new demands. With central heating central cooling, all of that kind of standard is increasing the per capita, you know.

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### 00:09:20 Heimo Scheuch

Bangalore, we have built a factory in Bangalore nearly now 20 years ago there was, it was in the rural part. Now today it's 4 sort of lane highway there. It's now developing very rapidly, et cetera. But this is now 50 kilometers away from Bangalore already, so it's growing dramatically. But when you go another two hours further, then you have rural parts which are not at all developed, where schools are lacking, where the whole infrastructure from the basic one, social, education, health to also small and mid sized companies, yeah. And I think here the planning also from a state perspective is something which has to..shifted to cities, yeah.

### 00:10:05 Anupama Kundoo

True! But you know when you compare about how Europe and America, how did when they went through urbanization, if you look 100 and something years ago when Berlin became what it is now, you know the the there was time to lay in the infrastructure and work systematically. One of the important things to take into account. Is the point in time where India is urbanizing. It's also driven by global factors, and even in those days. How does the city finance its urbanization? It is through the surplus that it puts aside, right? That's how you build things. But we are a colonized country. The surplus didn't stay with us, our surplus was taken to develop other countries elsewhere. So it's it's that there are those factors that are a big baggage in on India. And actually I would like to really reverse the problem that when we go to India, the problem is seen, for all to see, open and simple and it's easier for us to address the solution because the people in India, they are flexible, they are adaptable, they are tolerant, they are used to lot of diversity and adaptation, they've had to adapt. Now when I would, I would like to really talk about this with one foot in each area, ok? So when I look at the problems of housing, that from outside the houses look fine. In in the developed countries there is no less of an affordability crisis in all of these countries and the the they are less able to first of all see the problem. The problems are underlying and deeply spread. We have raised the housing standard to such an extent every time there's a new technology, we have to have it. And now, even if somebody want, that's the problem for me of the West. Like, if I come to a room and I want to draw my own curtains, even in a hotel, I'm forced to go and find where is the button, that I can then press it. I enter the canteen of my own university, I have to first press something so that something will press something and then you know what? I'm not allowed to use my own hand, and then I have to pay for another gym so that I can go and use my hand there to remain healthy and we are forced to pay that price just because someone invented a curtain drawer. Now we all have to use it. I'm sorry I'm exaggerating to make the point, but what happens is the standard that we have raised the house to, including the kind of insulation, the kind of. Who's going to pay that, really? The people have to pay it and look at the percentage of your salary that goes into a housing. I think this is all, I don't know. I mean, I know from the Western perspective, it looks like those problems are enormous. I find it much worse because who's going to go back and undo all the mistakes? You know, so while we...

### 00:13:14 Heimo Scheuch

Actually they are...

### 00:13:14 Anupama Kundoo

You know, so while we want India to develop, I personally strongly aspire that we do not go the Western way and I do not think, I do not, I would like us all to redefine what

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development means, what progress means in the times of our concerns about sustainability.

### 00:13:36 Heimo Scheuch

Well, I think when when I listen to you and I when I travel to the US as you do and throughout Europe, we are living in a phase of change, a lot of people are asking these questions. We are not allowed to talk about them because if you, if you do..

### 00:13:53 Anupama Kundoo

Not even here on the podcast? [Laughing]

### 00:13:54 Heimo Scheuch

Nooo, with me, you are indeed! But if I may say so, we are not allowed allowed to talk about this, because otherwise you would be considered as reactionary or opposed to progress or opposed to innovation.

### 00:14:09 Heimo Scheuch

I think the good thing is that step by step we will engage in this because this current crisis that we're living through with inflation that is growing, costs are increasing and what you are saying, can we afford it - question mark? Because what you are saying, if I have this automatization going on and digitalization going, it consumes more and more energy, it becomes more and more expensive for each of us and at the end of the day, we can't. afford it, ja?

### 00:14:37 Anupama Kundoo

Well, I'm also not ruling it out. What I'm saying is, in this,... we are talking about smart cities. We're talking about smart technologies. My question is: Shouldn't we be smarter than the technology? I mean, how the human being, not only as an inbuilt computer, we are also wise as opposed to only smart. So yes, technologies must go go on. But must I use it everywhere? Where is the discrimination? Should we not be developing a discrimination? Saying that you know what? This technology is fantastic for this and this, but I really don't need it for my curtain or some people need it. Not everybody!

### 00:15:22 Heimo Scheuch

It's a very, very good question, a very valid one, but I think obviously such questions need to be asked in a more governmental state way, as well because obviously you need to change some regulations. We have been becoming over regulated in our in our part of the world, if you may allow me to say that..

### 00:15:44 Anupama Kundoo

No, absolutely.

### 00:15:45 Heimo Scheuch

.. because we we want to regulate everything because we think, for example, when you take the the current subjects like climate change. Or economic growth and the the whole aspect with inflation that we need to regulate further and not let the humans decide how they want to address it. Yeah.

### 00:16:05 Anupama Kundoo

But I believe that I look whatever I have done in my life so far and wherever I've got, I believe if I were to leave it to the politicians. I would, I would be waiting still. OK. I'm not

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saying no to the I'm not. I'm I love the politicians, actually. OK. Because I would love to do that, but I have some other role to play in society, so I'm glad for them to do their bit, but I don't want to just sit there passive. So whether I am in a school as a student, whether I'm a member of a society. Every day I make decisions and I think everybody makes those micro decisions every day and I really believe in the consciousness and I believe there is a contagious aspect, good and bad things can rapidly spread. Look, I also like to look at the good examples. When I came to Berlin the first time 30 something years ago, everybody is making fun of those eco people who were who were insisting on eating organic food and they were saying I'd rather eat half as much and have it organic. And people were saying you'll never get everybody, "Wir sind hier in Deutschland" and that type of thing. So, but look who's, who got the last laugh, you know? So the point is, I don't even believe in creating again a new polarisation between these people and those people. I think everybody should do what they are passionate about, so what I've done in my life is like if I really am passionate about a thing now where there is, we keep thinking it's a norm that doesn't let us. Yes, but it's not that there are many people who've spent their time. I have a friend. She's..she teaches in Vienna and lives in Berlin too. She has built her house with, with, with Porotherm without using this kind of bad "Wärmedämmung", because the same norms were applied, but she sat and did the math. It's not the norm, it's very easy. We I think the main problem is people. We've we have raised a few generations. Who are not taking responsibility? I feel. I think each and every household. You have to think, OK, what can I do? There's something I can do, I can choose to drink this water or not to drink this water. I can choose to forget about that curtain operator. I can choose to not have a curtain. I can choose not to live in that house. Every day there are things I can choose. So in the end, we all make it. And when in you know and I think the shift is also happening because all the people are asking for it.

### 00:18:41 Heimo Scheuch

But still I must say, I mean I 100% agree with you by the way. But and it.. it's a pleasure for me, listening to you when you say passion because obviously with us Wienerberger, 200 years old, the company. 20,000 people that are working with passion and we always try to find new ways and and ways to shift and develop construction and infrastructure further make it not only cheaper, more efficient, but also sustainable to in this sense to protect resources and energy. But still when I look at the the change process we could build, and I come back to my social housing issue, we could build much cheaper, much more efficient and much healthier houses than we are building it today. Because the the requests the laws, the regulations that we unfortunately have in place and that's not I did them but and I'm not blaming anybody, I'm just saying we still need to think about those. If they're really good or or efficient, I think this is the process that we need to start because then we can make it much cheaper, much more efficient and faster, because then people don't pay so much money for the for the housing and we will get more housing done. And when I see the whole discussion in Germany prefabrication quick, fast and the construction, it's going the wrong way again because it's, it's inefficient, yeah.

### 00:20:11 Anupama Kundoo

Yeah, I think we have to start looking at natural resources alongside human resources. I think this whole idea of, you know, time is money is the thing I have questioned from the West. Also this for me is a dogma because a lot of times, you know, keeping the human being out of the equation and only making sure the machines are busy has led

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to the human engagement becoming numb. And you're talking about passion. I just want to share one thing: my PhD was called building with fire. It's because it was about brick but it was because of passion. Fire. You know, building with fire was because I had my PhD was about the work of Rainmaker [CHECK NAME - RÜCKFRAGE ANUPAMA], a Californian ceramist who has pioneered the technique to build large brick houses in Situ, mud houses fired in Situ. That means the joints are also mud. So I have also done some houses in this technique and and many other radical kind kind of you know thing. But you know if you don't have passion then. You can't sustain when you have difficulty, and that's so I think I think that I think we have to generate passion because if we generate, I mean.. all we have to, I think people who are passionate, they will retain their common sense and they will know where they want to innovate and go beyond the conventional habits. So I think as a society I'm also a professor. I try to do that bit also there that you know we try to not dampen the passion of the students. If they ask inconvenient questions, they should, that's their job. Don't hush them!

### 00:22:12 Heimo Scheuch

Yeah, but that's also the same in the company, to be honest. Yeah, we need people who ask questions, who actually obviously put into question what we do, because that's what you're saying and we we, we should not always use the same paths. We should go away. And I think what we need to, and I'm very appreciative that you, as a professor, do this with your students. We try to do it with our employees to have critical ones, to have ones that actually question the the process that we do, how we do it. And that takes us to the next level. Yeah. And when you talk about passion and common sense, I can only say to you we have it in our corporate culture.

### 00:22:53 Anupama Kundoo

I'm I'm glad you have.

### 00:22:54 Heimo Scheuch

Yeah. And sometimes I worry that some people put the.. where have they put the common sense? Yeah? And that's my remarks about the rural India. I come from the rural parts of Austria.

### 00:23:06 Anupama Kundoo

Where?

### 00:23:06 Heimo Scheuch

Yeah, from Carinthia the mountains and common sense there is your your way, how to you survive, because you need to work through the year, yeah?

### 00:23:16 Anupama Kundoo

But that's what I feel actually, you know, no other species on the planet can take their life for granted and be entitled. That's my question to what the developed country is like, comfort zone is not a good thing. Comfort zone is not only a good thing. Just be in the limit to be enough. You know the the decision between adventure and security? I think in in what you've seen in India, when you see people in difficulties, you know.. You know, it's by itself. It's like facing life. It's not out of every tiger has to wake up in the morning and decide there's not us insurance behind them, you know, and what they're going to do. Every bee goes to work and it.. they don't make a difference between work and life because they see that they are working for themselves to live. Work is an

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extension of your life. It is to realise your potential. But sometimes in the post industrialization. And so I don't make a critique on the West. For me, the critique I'm making in the West is of mainstream industrialization. When our countries have been industrialised but not, it's not standardised as as only we don't have only S, M, L, you know of everything. So we have to get ourselves measured, figure out what we need and so on, and sometimes go for the M, L, whatever, but not only, whereas, but I criticise whatever I have criticised here up to now. Is not a particular nation or a particular state of development. I'm criticising what happened to us when we became industrialised, mainstream industrialised, just because we've made machines and outsourced things to them. We should should think whether we outsource things like doing our laundry and stuff like that and use our time better or whether we should outsource the whole living. And just because you're using robots, you don't need a robot. The whole idea is, let the robot do its work. You be the human, you know, and have a good life. And I think sometime this whole idea of, you know, just measuring, that's why when I talked about time is money, you know, so we did all of this, the West. I'm saying we because I'm now here in Berlin. We've outsourced everything. We're saving our time. We're saving human time. Do we have more time? Each and every human. Why are they just getting illnesses out of stress? That they don't have time. So where did all the time go that they saved, you know, these are very important things to think about in the end of the day.

### 00:25:56 Heimo Scheuch

But you said also wisely. Yeah. And that the human being needs to think about what is really its purpose and what we serve.

### 00:26:05 Anupama Kundoo

Exactly yeah!

### 00:26:05 Heimo Scheuch

This is something we need to be more and the future generations need to do this more and more!

### 00:26:11 Anupama Kundoo

Mm-hmm. And I think we what all we can do, I think is to not suppress them, because they they will, they know how to live like every plant will break out or shoot from your create roots. Life is powerful and we can't do anything to suppress it. But the point is we create rules, we create all kinds of things based on our comfort zone, thinking that the best we can give our child as a comfort zone or our next generation. Maybe not? You know, maybe we have to let them understand the value of life and not feel entitled and not take things for granted. And things will cost us all less. And by the way, I want to do want to mention one thing. All the problems that we you mentioned and all we wherever I go and we have always "meckering". Sorry, I mean all this whining about this problem and most of those problems are man-made. In other areas of the world, when we say there's a problem, we're talking about a tsunami we're talking about natural catastrophes that you cannot avoid, but at least the man-made ones. First of all, we can make a difference between the natural laws such as gravity and climate. Let's please not question it. Surrender to it. And the man made-laws. Please question everything and see if it can be done better, but often we see in the younger students they don't know which they just are obedient to the man-made laws and defying natural laws like putting the window on the wrong side of the building.

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### 00:27:45 Heimo Scheuch

I think what is better to finish a very passionate discussion with you with these words and uhm.., because I think it's so important that we come back to common sense again that we give and you said something very beautiful for me. You said, life is powerful! And what is better to think of this, what power we have all of us, the humans, and not cut bridges and destroy bridges. I think what we are currently doing but create bridges again of cultural exchange of sorts and the philosophy also yeah, because it's this approach that is lacking right now, because when you are saying engaging with each other to find new solution, it means that we talk first of all and today we are not even talking. Yeah, we are cutting bridges and this is politically and geopolitically a big risk. And together I think when you talk about India, Europe, we can we can sort of tackle these these challenges to get a much better,.. than each of us alone and giving back the force to the people that they think about new solutions and, that you nicely put it the man-kind problems here, that we create ourselves every day. Yeah. And we trained to o..as I said earlier, to over regulate also in the building world. We should give this power back to the people and try to launch a new approach when it comes to to the housing.

### 00:29:17 Anupama Kundoo

Yeah, May may I add just the summary like when you talked about the human I in all my years of reflection, I.. I feel the purpose individually and collectively. I feel this is a common acknowledgement. Also, a commonly acknowledged thing, that the best is to amplify the human potential, and that is something we can say as a common ground. But what is this unique thing to be a human and to survive and evolve is actually 3 qualities for me: One is imagination. Humans have imagination. We can imagine anything and we can we can try out new things. We can experiment, innovation. All these things you are doing. So I'm mentioning it, summarizing it. And the third is the capacity to adapt, like we adapted during COVID. So these are the three qualities that are behind evolution and I think these we have to celebrate these qualities. Humans, and then of course, we have our optimism.

### 00:30:29 Heimo Scheuch

Let's keep the optimism and cultivate the imagination. I know it would be great to continue. I know we will do it in India pretty soon.

### 00:30:33 Anupama Kundoo

Yes, yes, yes!

### 00:30:38 Heimo Scheuch

I hope! I thank you. Thanks for coming by. I know that you have to run for the Future Brick Days.

### 00:30:37 Anupama Kundoo

Yes, that sounds promising.

### 00:30:38 Heimo Scheuch

I hope I thank you. Thanks for coming by. I know that you have to run for the Future Brick Days.

### 00:30:44 Anupama Kundoo

I love bricks!



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### **00:30:46 Heimo Scheuch**

Yeah, I know. And we, we love bricks as well as you can imagine. So thank you for joining me and hope to see you soon. Bye bye.

### **00:30:51 Anupama Kundoo**

Thank you very much.

### **00:30:53 Anupama Kundoo**

Looking forward, thank you!