

Driving  
change  
for better  
cities

## What did we learn from the autumn URBACT workshop in Vienna and Zagreb?

Analysis of the Sonnwendviertel, SuperGrätzl, Biotope City, Nordbahnviertel and Argentinierstrasse, Revitalisation of public spaces (Zagreb's URBACT GP) projects – adaptability and key learnings

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# Overview

**Date:** 19–20 September 2025

**Organisers:** URBACT National Contact Point & Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Department of Urban Planning and Urban Green Infrastructure

## Participants (total 50)

- 40 students
- 3 PhD students
- 7 researcher and professor



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# Aim of the study trip

The aim of this study trip was to explore **Vienna's good practices in sustainable urban development**, with a particular focus on:

- affordable housing,
- climate-adaptive urban design, and
- participatory planning approaches.

# [The Property Developers' Competition - Vienna

## URBACT Good Practice

- Central to Vienna's **housing & urban development policy**
- Operated by **Wohnfonds Wien**
- Goal: **innovative, sustainable, socially inclusive, affordable housing**



## Eligibility

- Non-profit and commercial developers
- Requirements:  $\geq 500$  subsidised units, **multidisciplinary project team**



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# The Property Developers' Competition

## Evaluation – Four-Pillar Model

- **Economic efficiency** – costs, long-term affordability
- **Social sustainability** – community living, adaptability
- **Architectural quality** – layout & design
- **Ecology** – climate-friendly solutions, green spaces

**Takeaway:** Housing not only financially driven → **urban quality & long-term sustainability**

# Revitalisation of public spaces - Zagreb

## URBACT Good Practice

- **Revitalisation of underused and neglected public spaces**
- Aims to transform public spaces into **attractive, inclusive and community-oriented places**

## Eligibility

- **Integrated, city-wide approach:** simultaneous revitalisation of multiple public spaces
- Strong cooperation between **local authorities, professionals, and local communities**
- Emphasis on **participatory planning and co-creation** throughout the process



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# Revitalisation of public spaces - Zagreb

## Approach

- Combines **top-down urban planning with bottom-up community initiatives**
- **Citizens are actively involved** in identifying needs and shaping design solutions
- **Transparent decision-making** and professional implementation

**Results and impacts:** Increased use and improved quality of public spaces, stronger social cohesion and community engagement, greater trust and collaboration between citizens and local government.

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# Site visits

- **five** locations
- guided by **Austrian Guides for Future** (Biotope City, Nordbahnviertel)
- lecture by **Helga Fassbinder** on Biotope City Wienerberg



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# Sonnwendviertel

- Brownfield redevelopment, near main railway station
- Integrated planning: housing, mixed uses, car-reduced mobility
- **Helmut Zilk Park** for climate adaptation



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- Vienna's superblock adaptation
- Reduces traffic, improves microclimate, strengthens community life
- resident participation

# Biotope City Wienerberg

- Nature-integrated urban district
- Green roofs/façades, biodiversity, rainwater management
- Pilot & research project for climate-adaptive development



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# Nordbahnviertel



- Vienna's superblock adaptation
- Reduces traffic, improves microclimate, strengthens community life
- resident participation

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# Argentinierstraße

- First Dutch-style cycling street in Austria
- Traffic reorganisation, permeable surfaces, green elements
- Improves urban climate, safety, public space quality



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# Climate-adaptive urban development

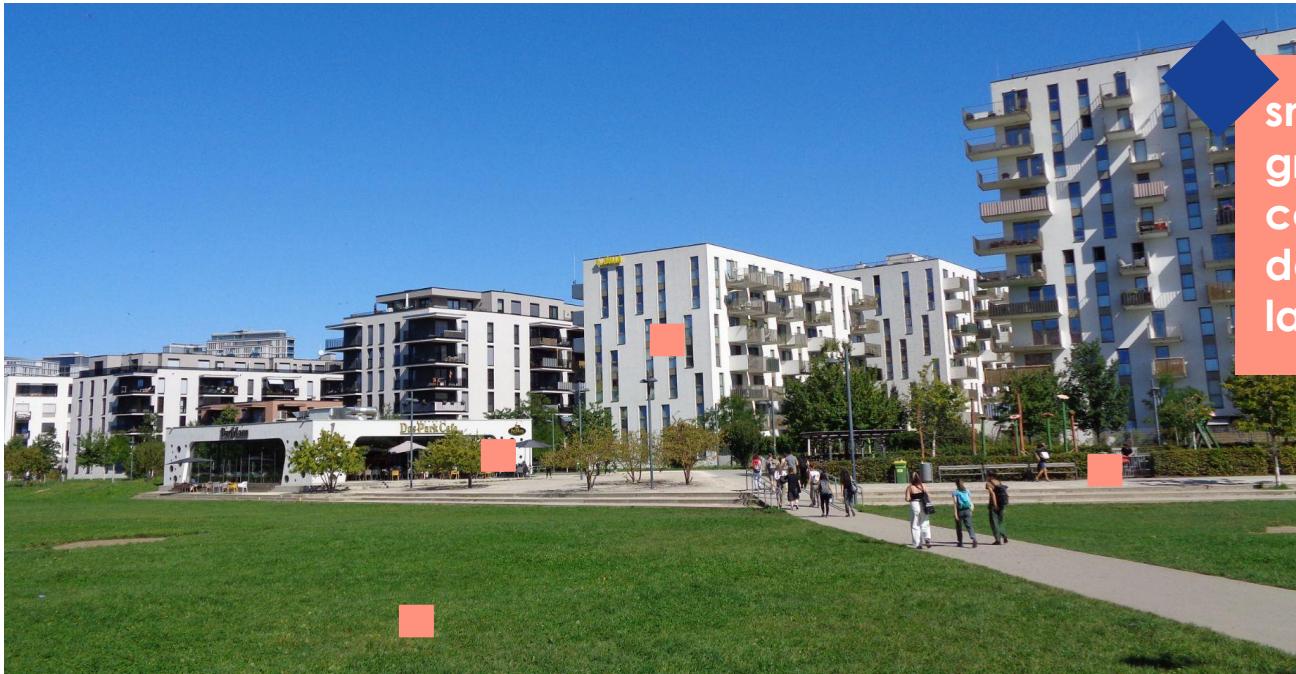
- **blue-green infrastructure tools: effective, simultaneous**
- **vegetated + water surfaces + combinations**
- **function as a system**
- types: rain gardens, tree planting with integrated root-cell systems, permeable pavements ...
- effects: water retention + infiltration > reduce flash flood risk + improve vegetation health + decrease irrigation demand ...

- **on-site rainwater retention:**  
**concave grass fields**  
**permeable pavement**  
(collect and infiltrate)
- **semi-natural maintenance**  
(phased mowing, taller grass edges, meadow ecosystems, evapotranspiration)
- **large park**  
(effective cooling)
- **low vegetation and small trees**  
(open, safe)



[landezine.com/helmut-zilk-park-by-uniola/](http://landezine.com/helmut-zilk-park-by-uniola/)

## Helmut-Zilk Park, Sonnwendviertel



small trees > overheat  
grass dries out  
cooling effect  
decreases  
lack of water features

Photo: Zámbó Dorottya

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**combines: intensive recreational  
+ semi-natural areas**

**Nature-Based Urban Resilience (NBUR):  
primarily natural processes**

native species

minimal intervention

near-natural habitats

natural succession

**>stronger ecosystem services,  
more resilient adaptation)**

**Freie Mitte, Nordbahnhviertel**  
park: 10 ha, project: 36 ha



[www.meinbezirk.at](http://www.meinbezirk.at)

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# [challenges

## Freie Mitte, Nordbahnhviertel



**limited shade +  
cooling effect**

**“urban wilderness”  
perceived  
unstructured,  
disorderly, unsafe**

Photo: Zámbó Dorottya

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- **high residential density, intensive**  
Biotope City: 2000 ppl/ 5.5 ha  
Erzsébetváros: 1300 ppl
- **green roofs and green façades**  
slowing and retaining rainwater runoff,  
shading and cooling buildings,  
reducing energy demand,  
providing new habitats
- **surface retention ponds**
- **community gardens**

## Biotope City

explicit greenery: 3 ha, project: 5,5 ha



Photo: Pinke Kitti



**high maintenance costs**

**special irrigation and support systems**

**easily damaged by extreme weather events**

**climate-regulating effect decreases**

Photo: Zámbó Dorottya

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# concept

- **parking spaces > green surfaces and community areas**
- **cooling and meeting points**  
(shade structures, water features)
- **reducing heat stress**
- **strengthen social connections**

## Super Grätzl

green space: ~1,5 ha, project: 9,5 ha



Photo: Zámbó Dorottya

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too low proportion of new green space + limited shade

> minimal effect on urban heat island reduction

Photo: Zámbó Dorottya

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- car traffic reduced + preferred: cycling
- parking spaces > green areas, rain gardens
- Multiple small green patches: act as ecological stepping stones, supporting biodiversity

**Argentinienvstrasse**  
100 new flowerbeds, 70 new trees, project: 1,23km



# challenges

## Argentinienstrasse



small greenery, low  
microclimatic impact

emission reduction  
awareness promotion

Photo: [wieden.spoe.wien/artikel/die-neue-argentinierstrasse](http://wieden.spoe.wien/artikel/die-neue-argentinierstrasse)

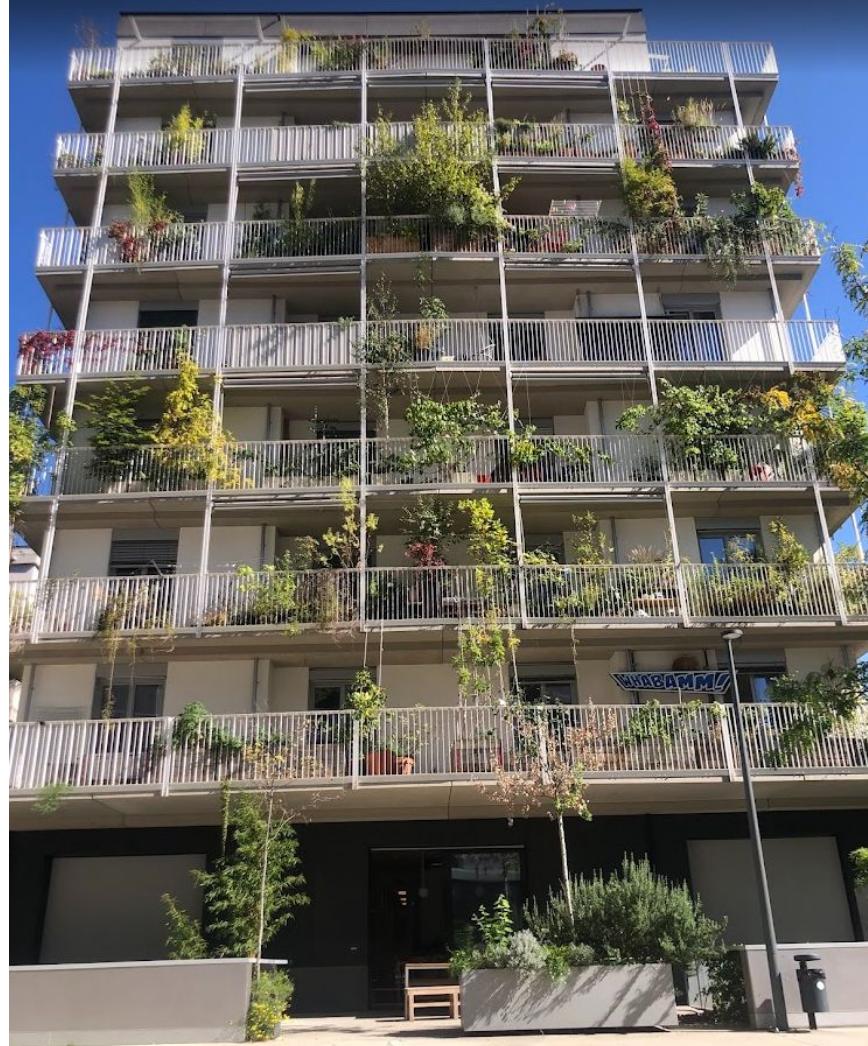
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- aim for sustainability, improving resilience
- same concept but different approaches
- >limited urban space: reduces effectiveness
- >complex solutions, network

**concept > realisation**



# Affordable housing

## Vienna

**Renters:** 75%

**Municipality owned apartments:** 20%

## Budapest

**Renters:** 16%

**Municipality owned apartments:** 4%

# Affordable housing

Vienna owns a large stock of apartments

Provides land for investors

Condition: build subsidized housing, in a given proportion (reduced rent)

Housing as infrastructure (builds, owns, maintains)

Limited-Profit Housing Associations

Not allowed to maximize profit

Banks fund them with low risk loans

# Affordable housing

**Apartments:** 5 500  
**Subsidized housing:** 35%

**Functions:** school, kindergarten,  
office, restaurants

**Park:** 7 hectare

**Total rea:** 31 hectare

**Apartment / hectare:** 140



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# Urban scale



# Nordbahnviertel

**30% building  
22% park  
6, 10, 30 storey  
buildings  
180 apartments / hectare**

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# Affordable housing

**Apartments:** 5 000  
**Subsidized housing:** 40%

**Functions:** school, kindergarten,  
office, retail  
restaurants, campus

**Park:** 7 hectare

**Total rea:** 36 hectare

**Apartment / hectare:** 180

## Nordbahnhviertel



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# Urban scale

Municipality:

Zoning and masterplan

Parcelling and selling to  
developers

Managing public  
spaces  
and parks



# Nordbahnhofviertel

30% building  
27% park  
6, 8, 20, 30 storey  
buildings  
140 apartments /  
hectare

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# Affordable housing

**Apartments:** 980  
**Subsidized housing:** 60%

**Functions:** school, kindergarten, offices

**Park:** -

**Total rea:** 6 hectare

**Apartment / hectare:** 160

# Biotope city

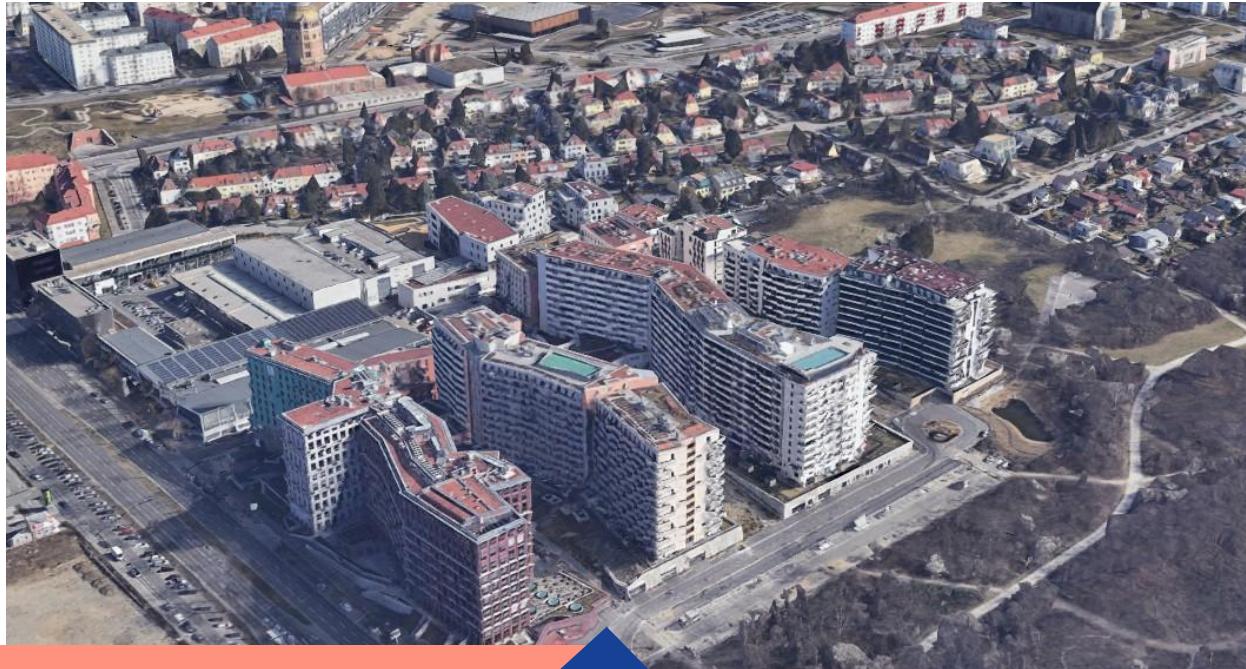


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# Urban scale



50% building  
6, 12 storey buildings  
160 apartments / hectare

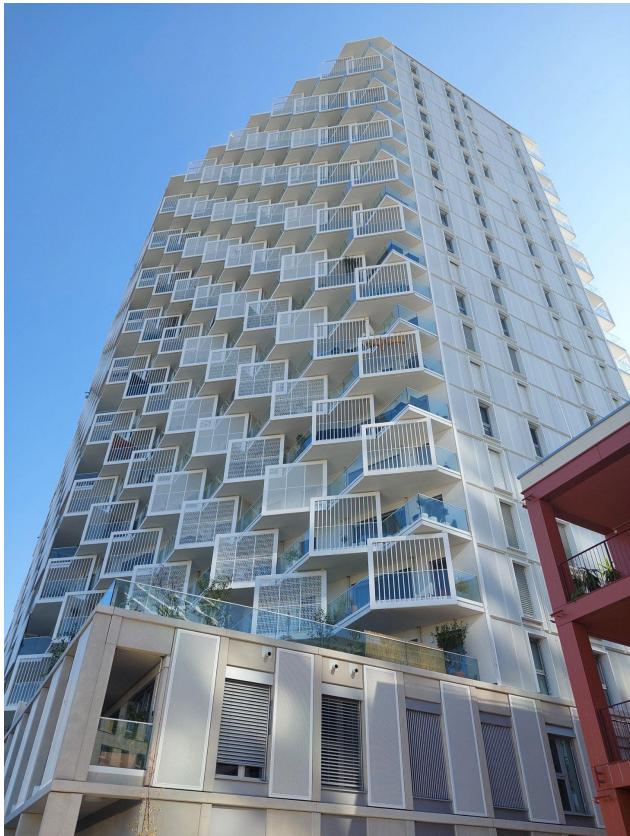
# Biotope city



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**Urban attributes:**

- ~150 apartments/hectare**
- 20-50% built-up area**
- 5-20 story buildings**
- Mixed functions**
- Large public parks**

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