

Driving change for better cities

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

Analysis of 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



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: ≥ 500 subsidised units, **multidisciplinary project team**



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



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.

Site visits

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



[Sonnwendviertel

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





- 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



Nordbahnhofviertel



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

[Argentinierstraße

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



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 ...

Helmut-Zilk Park, Sonnwendviertel

park: 7 ha, project: 31 ha

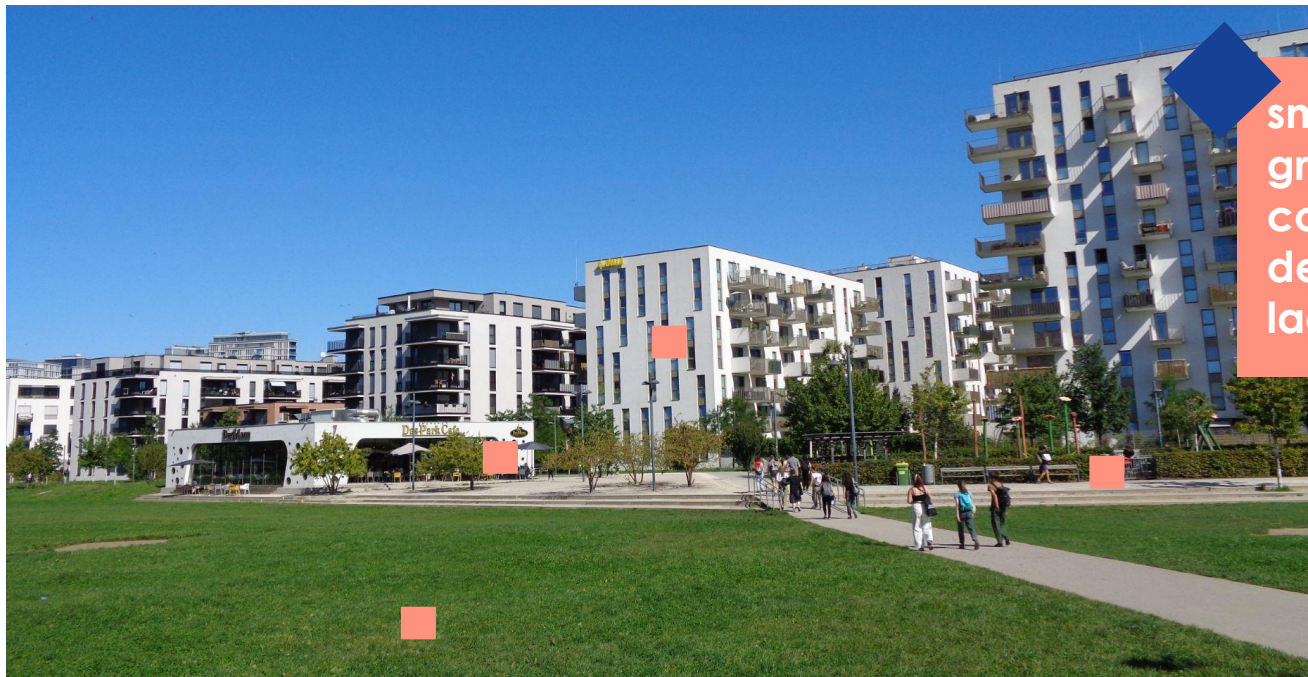
- **on-site rainwater retention:**
concave grass fields
permeable pavement
(collect and infiltrate)
- **semi-natural maintenance**
(phased mowing, taller grass edges, meadow ecosystems, evapotranspiration)
- **large park**
(effective cooling)
- **low vegetation and small trees**
(open, safe)



landezine.com/helmut-zilk-park-by-uniola/

challenges

Helmut-Zilk Park, Sonnwendviertel



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

Photo: Zámbo Dorottya

**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, Nordbahnhofviertel

park: 10 ha, project: 36 ha



www.meinbezirk.at



limited shade +
cooling effect

“urban wilderness”
perceived
unstructured,
disorderly, unsafe

Photo: Zámbo Dorottya

[concept

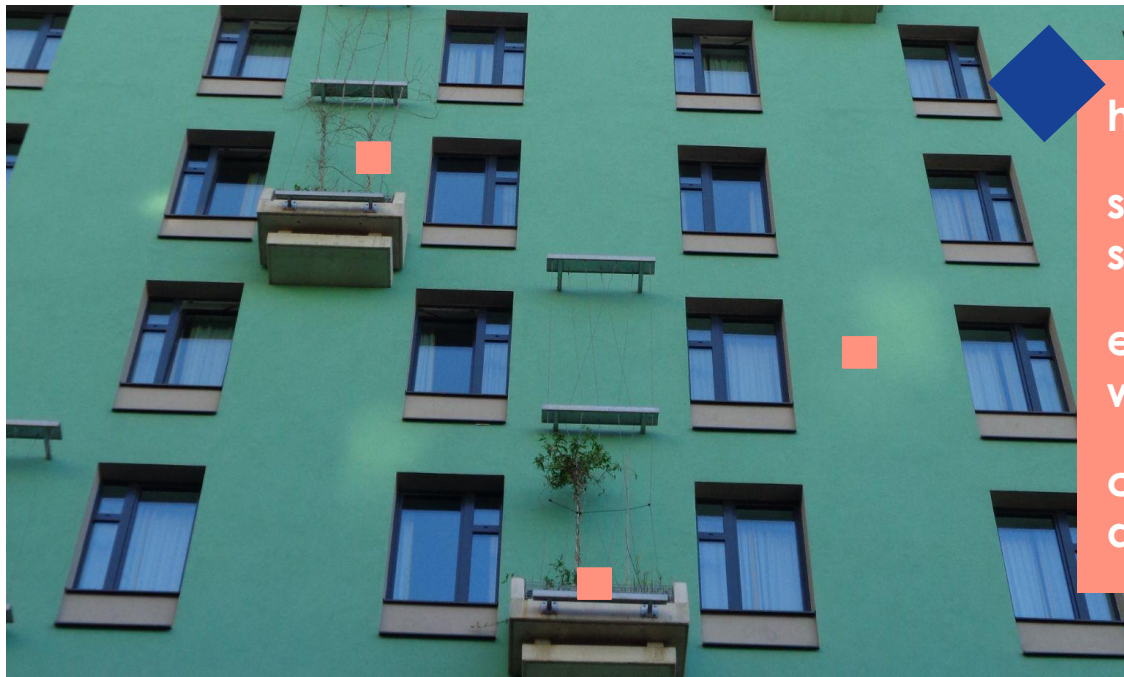
- **high residential density, intensive**
Biotope City: 2000 ppl/ 5.5 ha
Erzsébetváros: 1300 ppl
- **green roofs and green façades**
slowing and retaining rainwater runoff,
shading and cooling buildings,
reducing energy demand,
providing new habitats
- **surface retention ponds**
- **community gardens**

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: Zámbo Doróttya

[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: Zámbo Dorottya



too low proportion of new
green space + limited shade

> minimal effect on urban
heat island reduction

Photo: Zámbo Dorottya

Argentinienstrasse

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

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



challenges

Argentinienstrasse



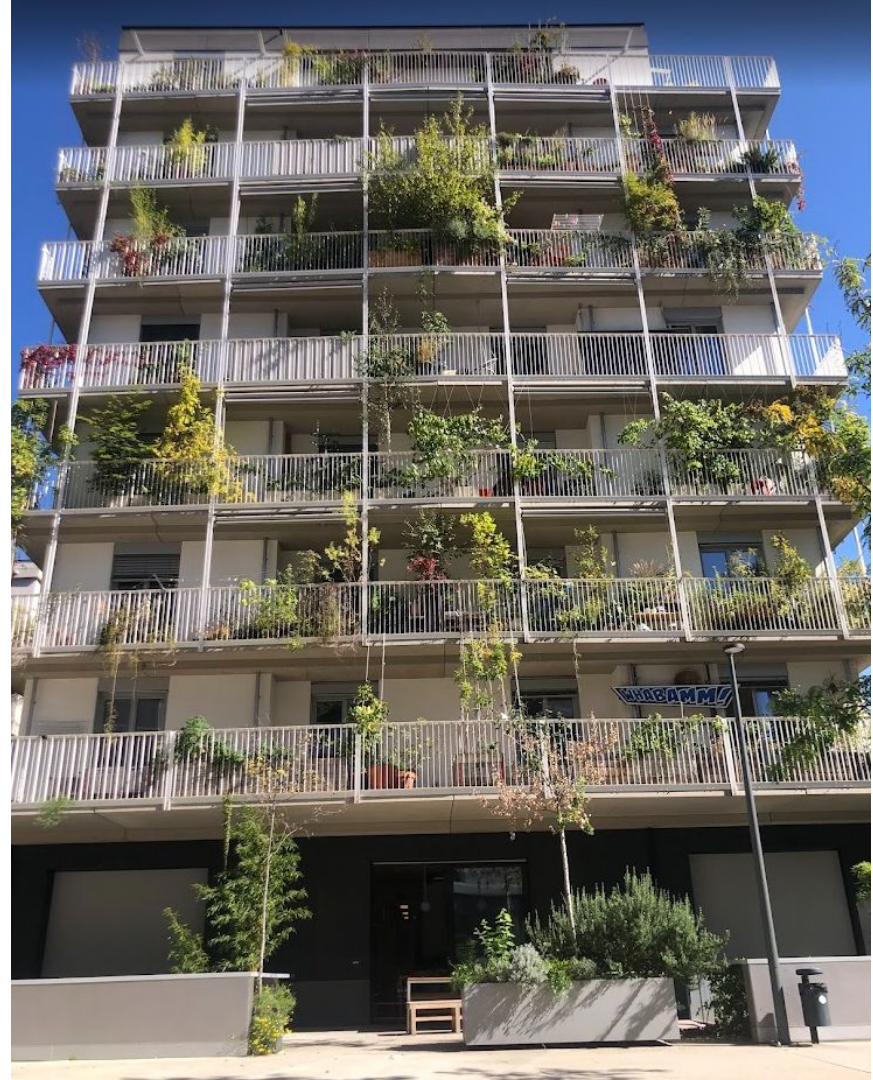
small greenery, low
microclimatic impact

emission reduction
awareness promotion

Photo: wieden.spoe.wien/artikel/die-neue-argentinierstrasse

- 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

Sonnwendviertel





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

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

Nordbahnhofviertel



Urban scale

Nordbahnhofviertel

Municipality:

Zoning and masterplan

Parcelling and selling to
developers

Managing public
spaces
and parks



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

Affordable housing

Biotope city

Apartments: 980
Subsidized housing: 60%

Functions: school, kindergarten, offices

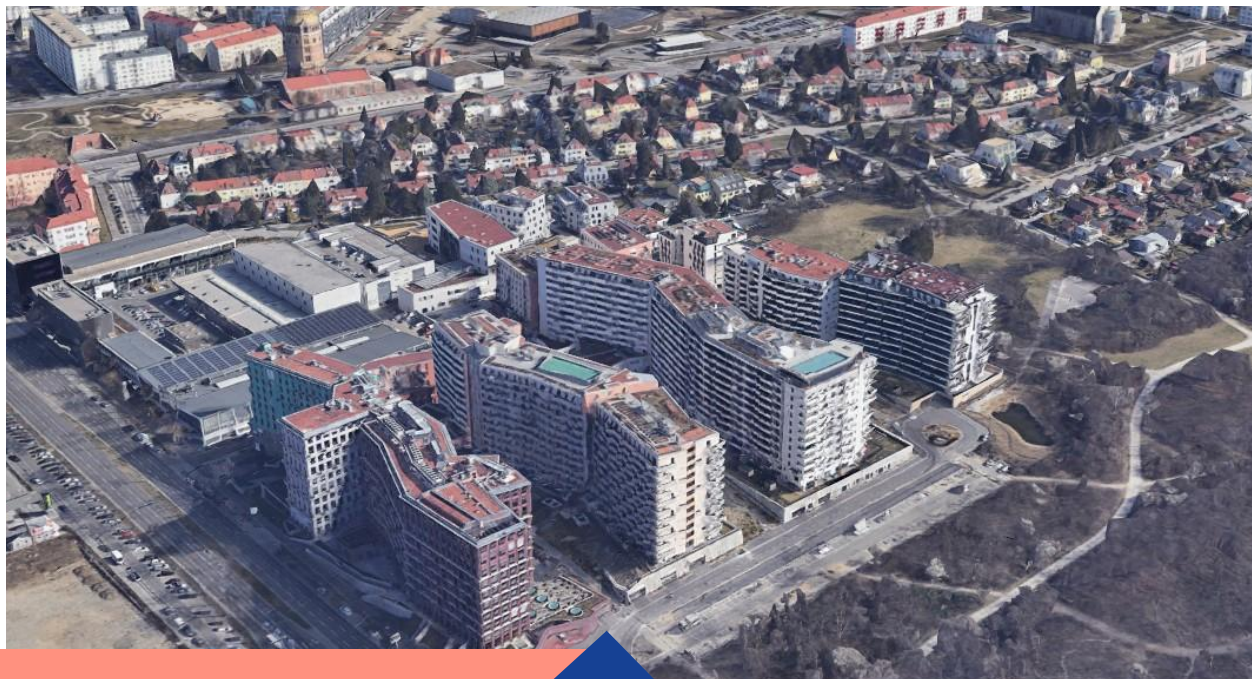
Park: -

Total area: 6 hectare

Apartment / hectare: 160



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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