



REDUCING  
HOUSING  
INEQUALITIES



## Case Study Working Paper: Amriswil

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 City profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition

### 1.1.1 City profile

#### Demographics and geography

Amriswil is a small, former industrial town in the Canton Thurgau with 14,825 residents (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). The political municipality of Amriswil consists of the town Amriswil and several surrounding municipalities<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1). Amriswil is located close to Lake Constance and within a rural region outside of a functional urban area (see map on cover page). The municipality covers an area of 19.0 km<sup>2</sup>, around 78% of which is either agricultural land or covered in woods (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).

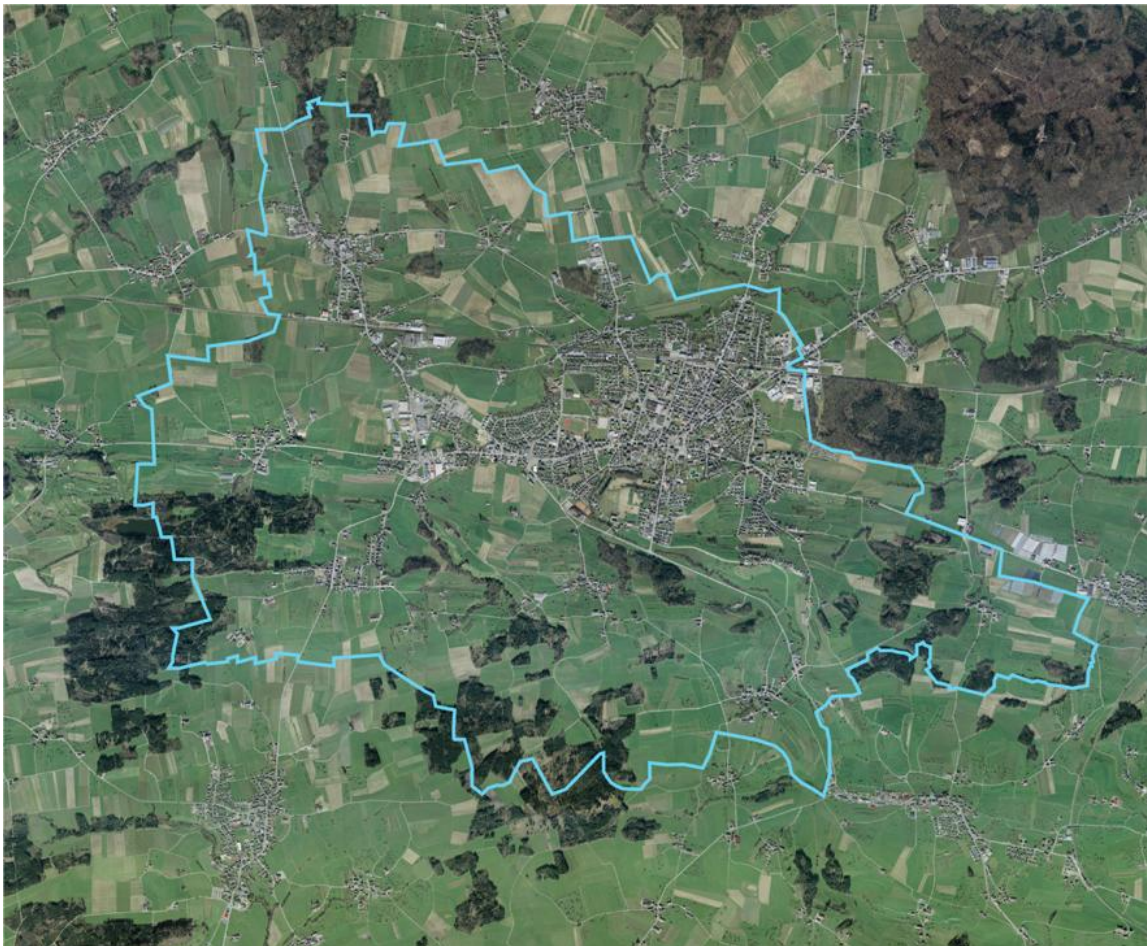


Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Amriswil. (© Federal Office of Topography swisstopo)

<sup>1</sup> Mühlebach/Schrofen, Oberaach/Niederaach, Biessenhofen, Schocherswil, Räuchlisberg, Hagenwil, Hemmerswil/Egg, Almensberg

After an extensive structural change from the textile industry to the service sector around the turn of the millennium, Amriswil's economy and population has been moderately growing. In the last decade, the population increased by 17%, from 12,699 to 14,825 (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). In 2025, 52.6% of the newcomers came from other municipalities in Thurgau, 24.8% from other Swiss cantons, and the remaining ca. 22.6% came from other countries. This pattern is similar to the rest of the canton. The share of non-Swiss nationals is 29.5% is slightly above the average 26,9% of the canton (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a) and the national average of 27.6% (BFS, 2025f). The share of non-Swiss residents in Amriswil is similar to the cities of St.Gallen (34.2%) and Zurich (33.7%) (see case study reports St.Gallen and Zurich). Roughly 19.8% of these are of North Macedonian nationality, 15.8% Italian, 14.6% German and 7.4% Portuguese (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). Details about the remaining nationalities are not reported. Amriswil has a higher than cantonal average population of North Macedonian origin. 19.6% of the population are 18 years old or younger, 29.5% are 19 to 39 years old, 31.7% are 40 to 64 years old, 13.8% are 65 to 79, and 5.3% are 80 years or older (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). Around a third of households are either single-person or two-person households. Three and four-people households make up around 12% of the share respectively, households with more than five people making up around 7%. Single and two-people households are the categories that have been growing the most in the last decade, while the other households have remained relatively stable (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). With a population density of 786 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (total area of the municipality), Amriswil is not very densely populated (BFS, 2025c).

In 2022 the median income in canton Thurgau was 6,125 CHF/month which is below the national median income of 6,788 CHF/month (Amt für Statistik Kanton Thurgau, 2022a; BFS, 2022) and significantly lower, for example, than in Zurich where the median income in the same year was 8,128 CHF/month (Stadt Zürich, 2024).<sup>2</sup> In Amriswil, the median equivalised income (accounting for different household sizes and composition) is the lowest in the whole canton: 50% of the inhabitants have an equivalised yearly income of less than 48,000 CHF (Grossenbacher et al., 2021). Currently 1% of the households in Amriswil rely on social welfare, similar to the cantonal average of 1.1%. In the last decade, Amriswil has seen a decline from 2.2% to 1.1%, closing the gap between the average social welfare quote on the canton (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). At 63%, municipal taxation is higher than in most municipalities in the canton (average municipal tax rate in the canton of Thurgau: 55.9%) (Amt für Daten und Statistik, 2025b; Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).

## **Economy and infrastructure**

In 2023, 6,730 persons were active in the labour market in Amriswil. Most jobs (66.2%) are found in the service sector, but despite the transition from an industrial town to a service economy, a relatively large share of jobs (30.8%) can still be found in the industrial and construction sectors. 3.0% of jobs are in agriculture and forestry (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).

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<sup>2</sup> For the city of St.Gallen there is no municipal data available; however, the average income per inhabitant was 55,052 CHF while the same indicator was 73,023 CHF for Zurich, indicating that Amriswil has a more similar average income per person and year to St.Gallen than Zurich (see case study report St.Gallen and Zurich).

Overall, more people commute from Amriswil to other places (4,533) than from other places to Amriswil (2939; Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).

Compared to the Canton of Thurgau, Amriswil is significantly more indebted, with a net debt of CHF 1,621 per capita (Thurgau: net assets of CHF 238 per capita) and a net debt ratio of 145.4% (Thurgau: –16.7%). Although Amriswil can more than fully finance its investments, its financial flexibility is weaker due to a low self-financing share (5.0%) and a high gross debt ratio (180.1%; Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).

The town has good transport connections, with a fast train service to Zurich (approx. one hour needed for one way) and a regional road network making commuting convenient.

### **Governance structure and political orientation**

The city council consists of 9 members of different political parties. Each of the council members is responsible for one department. One of the members is simultaneously the mayor, who is elected separately. The city does not have a parliament, but the eligible voters gather once a year for the municipal assembly where various issues (including the municipality's budget) are put to a vote.<sup>3</sup>

Politically, Amriswil is rather conservative; the strongest parties in the municipality are the conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) with 30.0% of the votes and the Liberal Party (FDP) with 18.9%, followed by the Centre party (10.2%), the Social Democratic Party (SP; 11.9%), and the Green Party (8.0%) (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). Compared to cities of similar sizes in the Canton of Thurgau<sup>4</sup>, Amriswil had a 6.5% higher average SVP voters' share in the cantonal legislative election of 2024. Additionally, it had a 5.2% lower share of voters for the Centre party, as well as a 4.6% lower share of Social Democratic votes and around a 4% higher share of FDP voters (Amt für Daten und Statistik Kanton Thurgau, 2025). Compared to the average of the whole canton, Amriswil has a slightly higher share of FDP voters, and a lower Centre Party vote share. In comparison to the cities St.Gallen and Zurich, has a significantly higher SVP share and a much lower part of the population votes for the Social Democratic party (see case study reports St.Gallen and Zurich). Juxtaposed to the parties shares in the national parliament, the Social Democratic Party and the Centre party have a lower share in Amriswil, while the FDP has a higher share (BFS, 2023).

#### **1.1.2 Housing situation**

Amriswil has a total of 7,317 dwellings (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). Recent years have seen an increase in construction activity, with twice as many new constructions between 2015 and 2020 than in the previous 15 years. Being a small town, this construction activity has a direct effect on the vacancy rate, which reached a historical peak of 8.8 % in 2020 (Stocker, 2023). In the following years the rate sank quickly to 1.76 % in 2024 (BFS, 2025b). However, Amriswil is still

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<sup>3</sup> This system is widely used in Switzerland. Of ca. 2,100 municipalities, only around 20% have a parliament. However, there are significant differences between language regions: small to medium-sized municipalities in French-speaking Switzerland and the Italian speaking canton of Ticino generally have a parliament, whereas in German-speaking Switzerland usually only large cities have one (Ladner, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Arbon, Kreuzlingen, Romanshorn and Weinfelden.

not facing a housing shortage. The numerous newly built apartments are covering the increasing demand while older buildings tend to stay empty longer (Stäheli, 2025). At the cantonal level, in 2023 two thirds of the newly built dwellings were in apartment buildings (Amt für Daten und Statistik, 2025a).

With 35.7% of homeowners in 2022, the city of Amriswil is very close to the national average of 35.9% and much higher than in the cities St.Gallen (17.4%) and Zurich (8%) (Amt für Statistik Kanton Thurgau, 2022b; BFS, 2025d; see case study reports St.Gallen and Zurich). 62.5% of the dwellings are rented out, and 1.8% are inhabited under other arrangements (e.g. leaseholding, reduced rate for employees, etc.; Amt für Statistik Kanton Thurgau, 2022b). There is only one non-profit housing provider: the housing cooperative “Thurgi-Hof” offers affordable housing for families, people with disabilities, and elderly (Wohnbaugenossenschaft Thurgi-Hof, 1992).

Most housing was built before 1970. A large share of single-family houses are currently inhabited by elderly people who will probably move out in the next decade. This is seen as a potential for structural and social renewal in the coming years (G. Macedo & M. Herzog, personal communication, 6 February 2025).

Roughly 53% of all residential buildings are single family homes. 27.7% are apartment buildings. The remaining ca. 20% are mixed-use buildings (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). The proportion of small to large apartment buildings is not recorded at municipal level. However, in the canton of Thurgau, 41.5% of flats in multi-family buildings are located in small multi-family buildings (up to 6 flats), while 58.5% are located in large multi-family buildings (7 or more flats; BFS, 2025e).<sup>5</sup> In the Cantons of Zurich and St.Gallen, 35% and 39.9% of all dwellings in multi-family buildings are situated in small multi-family buildings. The Swiss average is reported at 41% (BFS, 2025e).



Figure 2: Vernacular house in Amriswil (© J. Duyne)

<sup>5</sup> Note that these figures refer to the distribution of flats, not to the number of buildings, unlike the percentages reported above.

Compared to the cities of St.Gallen and Zurich, Amriswil has a significantly higher share of single family houses than St.Gallen (31.7%) and Zurich (25.4%; BFS, 2025a). Indeed, both these cities have a much higher share of apartment building (St.Gallen: 47%, Zurich: 48.5%) while having similar shares of mixed-use building (Zurich ca. 26.4% and St.Gallen 20.8%; BFS, 2025a).

Around 58% of the dwellings are three-to-four-room apartments, while one-to-two-room apartments, five-room and six-or-more-room apartments each account for around 15% of the total number of apartments. Over the last ten years, three-to-four-room apartments made out the largest share (58%) of newly built apartments, followed by 21% with five rooms. One-to-two-bedroom apartments only made out 12% and six-or-more-room ones 9%. Nonetheless, comparing year-over-year growth rates, five-and-more-room apartments have been on the rise, relatively (Kanton Thurgau, 2025a).



Figure 3: Amriswil's Central Square (© J. Duyne)

As one of the regional centres in the canton, Amriswil absorbs many social functions like housing and care for the elderly, assisted living and educational facilities. This represents quite a challenge for the municipality because, as was mentioned earlier, the average income of Amriswil's residents is comparatively low, resulting in a low tax income. To boost fiscal income (and eventually lower tax rates), the municipality aims to attract higher-income families and young professionals (G. Macedo & M. Herzog, personal communication, 6 February 2025).

Most new housing construction is carried out by private investors (94.5%; Kanton Thurgau, 2025a). This points to the crucial role of private owners for urban development and to the importance of a good cooperation between local authorities and private owners for steering any change, including the green transformation. A sort of "parallel housing market" was also mentioned by one interviewee who maintained that roughly 10% of construction projects are undertaken by companies owned by migrants from the Balkan region. However, no further details could be found on this issue.

The *Housing Promotion Agency* (Wohnbauförderung) is the only public agency providing housing support in Amriswil. The agency implements national measures for the promotion of affordable housing jointly for the Cantons of St.Gallen, Thurgau and Appenzell Innerrhoden.

Recent housing development projects in Amriswil include housing for seniors built in 2024 by the “Alters und Pflegezentrum Amriswil” (APZ, a Care Centre for the Elderly and Disabled) which includes 30 flats for elderly or disabled people that can be rented for independent living or for assisted living. Once completed, the APZ (“Alters- und Pflegezentrum Amriswil”, 2024) will own close to 100 affordable flats. Furthermore, private investors recently started the housing project *Breitenbach*, which includes 107 apartments of different sizes for sale and for rent. The settlement is planned as an energetically sustainable construction and will also include nature-based water retention solutions (Stadt Amriswil, 2025d).

## 1.2 **Densification, energy refurbishments, and nature-based solutions (NBS) in Amriswil**

As a small town, Amriswil orients its policies primarily towards the implementation of cantonal regulations and subsidy programs, while municipal programs can be seen as supplementary. The conservative political orientation of the voting population (and hence also the city council) constrains the promotion of green transition measures if they are not mandated by higher levels of government. The following sections give an overview of environmental and energy policies (EEPs) currently implemented in Amriswil, with a focus on densification, energy refurbishments, and nature-based solutions (NBS).

### 1.2.1 **Densification**

Densification has been a key policy goal in Switzerland since the 2014 revision of the Spatial Planning Act, when densification became legally binding for cantons and municipalities. As a consequence, cantons had to align their cantonal structure plans (*Richtpläne*), and municipalities in turn play a central role in steering densification locally through utilization plans (*Nutzungspläne*) (Duyne Barenstein et al., 2025b).

The Cantonal Structure Plan of the Canton of Thurgau (*Kantonaler Richtplan*), last revised in 2023, identifies Amriswil as one of 6 cantonal urban centres, which means that the minimum density to be aimed for in zones with housing is higher than in other municipalities (86 inhabitants and full-time equivalent jobs / hectare; Kanton Thurgau, 2023a). The main instruments of municipal planning in Amriswil are the Municipal Structure Plan (*Kommunaler Richtplan*), the building regulations and the zoning plan, the plan for the protection of nature and cultural heritage (under the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage (*Natur- und Heimatschutzgesetz*)) and the *Special Land Use Plans* (*Sondernutzungspläne*).

Amriswil last revised its building regulations and the zoning plan in 2020. In the same year, it published a conceptual plan for the designation of areas where high-rise buildings are possible within the city (Konzeptplan Eignungsgebiete für höhere Häuser und Hochhäuser; Stadt Amriswil, 2020b). The new zoning plan identified several areas for upzoning, mainly in the centre (e.g. along the Bahnhofstrasse, see Fig. 4 and 5) and along the main traffic corridors (Hess, 2020). As a result, building zones now require a minimum building density, defined by a minimal number of storeys which new buildings must not fall below (Stadt Amriswil, 2020a). This should lead to a slow replacement of the old stock and an increase in building density over time (see Fig. 6).



Figure 4: Aerial photograph of Amriswil with Bahnhofplatz and Bahnhofstrasse (central axis). Source aerial photograph: Federal Office of Topography swisstopo.



Figure 5: Amriswil's Bahnhofstrasse leading to the train station (© S.Rohner)



Figure 6: Buildings to be demolished at Bahnhofplatz (© J.Duyne)

### 1.2.2 Energy refurbishments

Amriswil received the 'Energy City' (*Energiestadt*) certification<sup>6</sup> in 2010 and was awarded the gold label in 2022. To some extent, this reflects an enhanced awareness of and support for climate goals and green policies. However, the municipality rejected the petition of Amriswil's green and social democratic parties to ratify the Swiss Climate and Energy Charter (*Klima- und Energie Charta*), arguing that achieving the Energy City label was sufficient.

The municipality is committed to the target of the 2000 Watt Society (*2000-Watt-Gesellschaft*), which aims to reduce energy consumption per person to 2000 watts by 2050, of which at least 1500 watts must derive from renewable energy sources (Stadt Amriswil, n.d.). It also supports the goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and the conversion of Switzerland's entire energy supply to 100% renewable energy by 2050.

In an earlier revision of the cantonal structure plan in 2016 it was decided, that every municipality with more than 2000 residents must elaborate a "Municipal Energy Structure Plan" (*Kommunaler Energierichtplan*) until 2022 (GIS Verbund Thurgau et al., 2021). The first Municipal Energy Structure Plan of Amriswil was adopted in 2017 and is currently under revision. The new version will be published by the end of 2026: The municipal steering committee for the energy and climate strategy organized a meeting where residents were invited to discuss the revision of the energy structure plan which will be binding on the authorities and the development of an energy and climate concept for the town of Amriswil (Stadt Amriswil, 2025a). To reach a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target, the existing

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<sup>6</sup> *Energie Stadt* is a national label awarded to municipalities that make efforts in the field of local energy and climate policy

940 oil- and 860 gas heating systems must be replaced at a faster pace, as currently only 40 per year are being replaced (Stadt Amriswil, 2025b).

To promote and support energy refurbishments, several policy instruments are in place. The Canton of Thurgau has a programme promoting energy refurbishments that complements the federal Buildings Programme (*Gebäudeprogramm*). Together, the two programmes subsidise insulations and energy efficiency retrofitting, *Minergie standard*<sup>7</sup> retrofitting, energy performance certification and consultation, and the renewal of windows in protected buildings. They also subsidise the replacements of fossil heating with renewable energy (solar systems, heat pumps and long distance heating) and with wood heating (Kanton Thurgau, 2025b). Additional subsidies are provided by the municipality of Amriswil for energy-efficient renovations that meet *Minergie standard*, and systems for renewable energy production. Moreover, Amriswil complements the cantonal subsidies with regulated amounts and mostly under the same conditions as the canton (Stadt Amriswil, 2024). Around 50–100 applications for some sort of subsidies are submitted to the municipality each year, according to a member of the administration. However, no official data could confirm this estimate (p26).

The canton and the municipality jointly offer energy advice, first contacts being partly free of charge. The public energy experts in the canton of Thurgau offer free consultations for homeowners and tenants through a specialised agency named *eteam* (*eteam*, n.d.). The municipality of Amriswil's own energy provider (*Regio Energie Amriswil*, REA) also offers energy consultations and acts as a contact point for homeowners (REA, n.d.). Regarding the subsidies received by the federal buildings programme, only cantonal data is available; Thurgau has quite a high amount of subsidies per capita (74 CHF/inhabitant) compared to Zurich and St. Gallen (40 CHF and 48 CHF respectively) and the national average of 59 CHF / per capita. In contrast to Zurich, the number of applications to receive subsidies have decreased in St. Gallen and Thurgau after having reached a peak in 2023 (BFE, 2025b).

### 1.2.3 Nature-based solutions (NBS)

A popular initiative to promote biodiversity, called Biodiversity Thurgau (*Biodiversität Thurgau*), was accepted in 2020, entailed the development of a cantonal biodiversity strategy in 2023. The strategy foresees the investment of CHF 46 million in intact and diverse habitats and species. Part of the strategy aims at a better integration of biodiversity into residential areas and mobility infrastructure, and to raise public awareness on related issues (Kanton Thurgau, 2023c).

Amriswil participates in the cantonal programme 'Natural Advantage' (*Vorteil naturnah*). This programme was extended and expanded as part of the action plan for the biodiversity strategy (Kanton Thurgau, 2023b). The programme provides financial support and guidance to municipalities in their efforts to make urban open spaces more biodiverse. The programme also has an educational purpose, aiming to persuade private property owners to move away from conventional outdoor planning towards more biodiverse solutions in residential areas (Kanton Thurgau, n.d.). In Amriswil, the programme entailed the redesign of multiple public

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<sup>7</sup> *Minergie standard* is a Swiss building standard focused on energy efficiency, comfort and climate protection. It is common for cantonal and local governments to support Minergie certification. (Schweizer Baustandard, n.d.)

areas in residential zones, and the municipality is planning to continue the funding of biodiverse measures.

The municipality promotes biodiversity in private green spaces and the reduction of ecologically poor environments by subsidizing the removal of stone gardens and neophytes and by offering local and diverse plants for private gardens at reduced prices. The municipality organises so called ‘plant pick-up days’ (*Pflanzen-Abholtag*). These events also function as educational programmes on the subject of biodiversity (Stadt Amriswil, 2025c).

Amriswil further pushes NBS with subsidies for the greening of roofs and façades, with a maximum of 3,000 CHF per building (Stadt Amriswil, 2024). With the renaturation of the two streams *Geissbach* and *Hegibach*, the municipality, together with the NGO ProNatura, has contributed to the regeneration of a natural habitat that helps fish to migrate upstream to their breeding grounds (Nagel, 2021b).

The municipality is currently developing a project to renew the public square at the train station (*Bahnhofplatz*, see Fig. 4 and 7). In 2022, the majority of Amriswil voters approved a 9.2 million CHF project to build a regional bus station and public transport hub. The square will be redesigned as a green urban space, making the area more accessible, safer, and more attractive (Nagel, 2021a, 2022). Amriswil also plans to further develop and densify the adjacent buildings. For strategic reasons, the city has therefore purchased properties near the train station (Kohn, 2017).



Figure 7: Render of the planned public square at the train station (© Tom Munz Architekt\*innen)

## 2 Methods

This report focuses on local perceptions of green transition interventions and their interlinkages with housing in Amriswil. In this small city, as discussed in the previous chapter, we could not find any site-specific green transition initiative with a perceived impact on housing inequalities: energy refurbishments and NBS initiatives are scattered across the whole territory, while some densification projects are planned but not yet implemented. As a core research method, we used semi-structured interviews focusing on green transition initiatives, housing, social sustainability in housing in relation to the green transition, and issues related to multi-level governance. For the case study of Amriswil, we conducted nine interviews between June and October 2025. Participants include members of the city council, representatives of the city administration, members of political parties, local associations and local businesses (the full list of participants can be found in Appendix 2). We built upon our knowledge from exploratory visits to Amriswil and informal interviews with the mayor and other members of the city administration and from the Policy Lab #1 (a workshop with stakeholders from the case study cities, from cantonal, and from the national level that was held in April 2025 in St.Gallen) to identify and contact an initial set of participants. Further participants were recruited via snowball sampling and through online research on relevant organisations.

While we interviewed stakeholders from the whole political spectrum and with different professional backgrounds, the report is primarily based on public and private actors, with civic actors being somewhat underrepresented. This is determined by the fact that in Amriswil there is hardly any political mobilisation around housing topics. Accordingly, we could not find any civic actor interested to engage in a discussion on related issues.

Interviews lasted about an hour on average, and were conducted either in person, via video call, or on telephone. Participants were asked to give informed consent. They were audio-taped and later transcribed using the software *Buzz* which runs on OpenAI's speech recognition model *Whisper*. We manually edited initial transcripts generated by AI to produce the transcripts used for coding. Coding was aided by the software MAXQDA and was performed with the transcripts in their original language (German). Quotes used in this report are translated to English by the authors.

This report also relies on grey literature, reports, legal documents, plans, and statistical data. It also draws on previous research in the framework of the ReHousIn project on housing inequalities in Switzerland (Widmer et al., 2024), environmental and energy policies (Duyne Barenstein et al., 2025b), and the Swiss housing system (Duyne Barenstein et al., 2025a).

## 3 Civic Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Amriswil

### 3.1 Precedents and Implementation

#### 3.1.1 Perceptions of the city

In this section we focus on stakeholders' general perception of Amriswil as a city and the related housing situation. As will be shown, all stakeholders agree that Amriswil's current housing situation and progress with the implementation of EEPs needs to be understood in relation to its industrial past, the current road and railway infrastructure, and the municipality's financial situation. Based on these considerations we start this chapter by focusing on our interviewees' overall perception of their city.

All interviewees underline the legacy of Amriswil's industrial past. As a result, even today the city is mainly inhabited by low-income workers (P23, 65-66; P25, 117; P28, 64-67; P55, 54-55, 62-65) (see quote below). This industrial past led to certain path dependencies, e.g. cheap, but low-quality housing, secondary sector enterprises, which resulted in the continued hosting of low-wage industries such as household appliances assemblage (65-66; P25, 117; P28, 64-67; P55, 54-55, 62-65).<sup>8</sup> With regard to housing, a civic-society representative mentioned that Amriswil has grown over a large territory, rather than as a compact and densely populated city (P28, 16). Additionally, many plots have been sub-divided over the last century, which has led to a high degree of land fragmentation (P55, 57).

We do indeed have historical baggage. The textile industry has actually been [...] a low-salary sector for a very long time. And there are perhaps certain sections of the population in Amriswil, still, where perhaps the next generation or two lives here. And accordingly, they are unable to fill the highly skilled jobs that perhaps need to be filled. That may also be a dangerous thing; I can't really back it up with figures, but it's just a gut feeling. (Civic society representative)

Due to the city's inability to attract higher wage industries the city is facing severe financial constraints, as it fails to attract higher-income residents, as reflected in low average income of its inhabitants. Eight out of nine interviewees mentioned this to be the municipality's biggest problem (P19, 62; P23, 66; P25, 117; P27, 71-74; P28, 17, 71). In fact, as discussed in section 1.1.1, the city has relatively high debts and not much financial flexibility. This is not only seen as having historical reasons but also caused by Amriswil's geographical location: in comparison to municipalities that are closer to the Lake Constance, Amriswil has not many 'environmental benefits', e.g. a good lakeside view (P19, 59; P27, 21-23; P28, 14, 22-23), a further constraint to attract higher income earners. This forces the municipality to keep their taxes comparatively high to make ends meet (P19, 59; P27, 21-23; P28, 14, 22-23).

The lack of a good road connection is another important factor contributing to the city's low attractiveness: as there is no direct highway from and to Amriswil, many industries avoid this location, according to a representative of the trade association (P25, 23). The absence of such

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<sup>8</sup> One of the largest employers of the town is specialised in the assembly of all-in-one coffee machines that are produced for large, international brands. Another large employer is focused on underclothing production.

a connection entails many additional problems such as traffic jams, which further lower the appeal of Amriswil to high-income-taxpayers (P28, 74). Until recently, an expressway that would have connected the easternmost region of the canton (*Oberthurgau*) to an existing highway, the *Nationalstrasse 23* (N23), was planned, but in November 2024, several national road expansion projects – including the N23 in Thurgau – were rejected by a national-level popular vote. At present, it is unclear if this expressway will ever be built. In Amriswil, even public and civic-society voices critical towards a car-driven development, agree that there is a need to improve the region’s road connections (P19, 104-106; P28, 14, 38, 74; P55, 23-28). Active forms of mobility such as walking and cycling, on the other hand, are not seen as a pressing problem in the municipality, although a concept is being developed in accordance with federal laws (P19, 116-117; P28, 29). This law obliges cantons and municipalities to plan their cycle path networks by 2027 and to implement them by 2042.

The express train connection which links Amriswil to larger cities like St.Gallen and Zurich is crucial to the city. The ongoing redesign of the station square (*Bahnhofplatz*, see Fig. 4) that will be completed by 2027 aims to increase the attractiveness of the station and to meet accessibility requirements to ensure that Amriswil will remain an express train stop, as mentioned by nearly all interviewees (P19, 63; P28, 26-27, 54; P26, 198; p55, 62) and underlined in the quote below. The project also includes biodiversity measures, but these are of secondary importance compared to the overarching goal of renewing the station square (P27, 124-128).

Now we are [working on the] new station square, and we need to ensure that the infrastructure remains in place, on the one hand, that the [...] [express train] stop remains, that the bus connections around it remain, that is extremely important for us, and then a beautifully designed station square is also part of it, so that people feel comfortable there. (Member of City council and representative of conservative party)

As highlighted in the quote below, all these factors are perceived to fuel a sort of vicious cycle: as Amriswil has historical, economic, and geographical constraints, building housing for higher-income-earners is not considered a viable option, nor is the lowering of the tax rate politically feasible (P19, 59, 70). This further amplifies the low attractiveness for high income earners (Fig. 8).

Nevertheless, according to several interviewees, the express train connection contributed, combined with the availability of relatively affordable housing (cf. Chapter 1.1.2 and 3.8), led to a steady population growth, as an increasing number of commuters have moved to Amriswil (P23, 30; P25, 156-158; P26, 178; P27, 71-74; P55, 19; P28, 56-59).

Furthermore, interviewees confirm that Amriswil plays the role of a central city in the region (P19, 62; P55, 51-52), which comes at a high cost, as the town must assume responsibilities and related costs in several sectors for the whole region (care for the elderly, youth institutions, infrastructure etc.) while bearing the full costs (P19, 62; P55, 51-52).

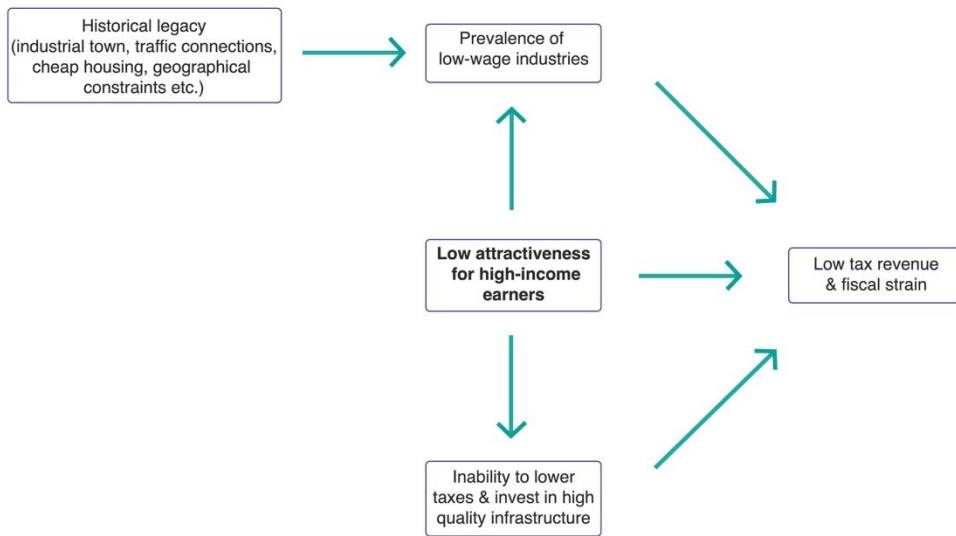


Figure 8: Perceived vicious cycle of low tax income in Amriswil

### 3.1.2 Implementations

New housing projects in Amriswil are in the mid-to-high-range price bracket and can often be rented out quickly (P19, 69-70; P25, 131-134). However, there is hardly any housing in the (very) high-price segment as high-income people have a preference for lakeside locations with lower tax rates than in Amriswil (P19, 59; P27, 21-23). A public actor mentioned an apparent shortage of larger flats for families and small (or micro) flats for single people (P27, 85, 141-142). In fact, as mentioned in Chapter 1.1.2, the share of small (less than three rooms) and large (more than four rooms) apartments is relatively small, although the number of large apartments is gradually increasing. Families in this region – like in many others – still have a preference for detached houses, but also in Amriswil they are only available in small numbers and at high prices. Public representatives mentioned that a factor contributing to the shortage of detached single family houses is that older people tend to stay longer in their houses than in the past (P27, 85; P55, 191-197):

I think it would also be nice for the young people [...] I have a lot of colleagues who are in their early 30s. They are now starting families and saying, yes, it would actually be nice if their parents moved out. Because of their age [...], they are now around 55 or 60 years old. Yes, it would be cool if we had a detached house, we have children now and we can use it now. And there are still many [older people] who would probably say, no, we have our work there, we still appreciate the garden (City councillor, conservative party)

One project that was mentioned by almost all participants is the redevelopment of the area along the *Bahnhofstrasse*. This has been in the planning for some time and will continue for at least a few more years (P23, 14-28). A total of around ten older and smaller houses will be demolished (P27, 153–157). Some of them were purchased by the city and will subsequently be sold back to investors after the planning phase has been completed. According to a local government representative, this will allow for a more coherent and attractive overall picture of this central city area (P27, 46-48):

We have a whole area near Amriswil station that is undergoing densification projects. [...] These are all small buildings that have also been rezoned. Several design plans are now underway there. Among other things, the city of Amriswil has purchased two properties there. Because they simply say that the properties are needed for the overall development of the area. [...] Many small flats, two-and-a-half-room flats. Relatively few underground parking spaces, too. Because they say these are commuter flats with a direct train to Zurich. [...] Of course, this is also with the support of the city of Amriswil, which purchased the key property. We also co-financed the design plan. But it's a private investor who is developing the project, and we simply said we could sell him the property. Because we didn't want anyone else to buy the property. Then the site would lie fallow, or we would have to plan around it. [...] So it's just a precautionary measure. Because we said that if something happens there, we'll buy the property and then we can have a say and make sure that the area is developed intelligently. [...] [I]n such a central location, if you see that something is happening [...] then it is also in the city's interest that we need it, that there is something smart happening, then it is definitely an option for us to purchase a property. (Representative of conservative party, Municipal Council)

According to representatives of the local government, the project was largely well received by the population (P19, 100-101) and met with little political opposition (P27, 153-157). Another large development, the *Breitenaaach*, is currently executed by the private company Thoma AG. It covers an area of 11,000 square metres and includes 100 three-and-a-half to five-and-a-half-room flats, half of which are for rental and half will be sold (P23, 14-26; P25, 131-132; P27, 79) (see also Chapter 1.1.2).

## 3.2 Participation and governance (procedural)

In this section we describe the different processes of governance that play a role in the housing situation of Amriswil by focusing on the processes that shape the dynamics between public/administrational bodies and private firms.

### 3.2.1 Perception of housing politics

As mentioned earlier and for reasons further discussed below (cf. 3.4, 3.6) housing is not perceived as a problem in Amriswil. In fact, Amriswil has quite a high number of vacant apartments and a high rate of new construction. Accordingly, there is no demand for the administration or government to become more active in housing policies, as was detailed by representatives of these branches (P27, 89, 117; p55, 90).

A public representative declared that the municipality as an actor is relatively weak (P27, 180-181). Despite its willingness to initiate projects, due to its financial constraints, it often lacks the resources to implement them consistently (P26, 48). Smaller initiatives – like the Fair Trade Town certification, which obliges the administration and local businesses to stock a minimum level of Fairtrade goods – are supported sporadically (P55, 36-37). The municipality also organises information events to involve and motivate people, for example in the case of larger projects or to promote energy refurbishments (P19, 64-67, 92-93).

Interviewees agree that the city is politically quite conservative (P25, 42, 98; P26, 13, 125; P27, 109; P55, 9; 77), also in comparison to other cities in the region. Indeed, as mentioned earlier (Chapter 1.1.1), Amriswil is significantly more conservative for example Zurich and St.Gallen, with a constituency more typical for rural communes than for cities, which generally tend to be more progressive.

### 3.2.2 Perception of governance processes and public administration

There is no regional cooperation on energy projects; moreover, cooperation with the cantonal energy advisory office does not always run smoothly, as was briefly mentioned by a member of the administration (P19, 65; P26, 30-31, 201-208).

In recent years, many framework conditions in Amriswil had to be revised and adapted to cantonal requirements (P55, 11-15; P26, 210-215, cf. Chapter 1.2). This was partly done with the participation of property owners and has laid the foundation for promoting densification (P55, 11–16, 57).

Another element that regulates the process between private individuals and the administration are the design plans. However, according to administration representatives and city councillors (P19, 10-13; P26, 94-99; P55, 58-61), the potential of these design plans is often not fully exhausted, particularly regarding green and energy measures. This is largely due to the opinion that an excessive number of requirements would increase construction costs in the municipality to such an extent that investors would no longer be willing to build in Amriswil (cf. Chapter 1.2.2), as illustrated by the following statement:

In connection with your topic, it must be said that we repeatedly have design plans that we discuss in the city council, where we actually have room for manoeuvre. [...] From a green perspective, we tend to make poor use of our opportunities, because we often already give the developers options [...] one is a little inhibited about imposing conditions and demanding more, even though one is also giving more. This is quite pronounced in our case. [...] It's really a bit of a fear that an investor might pull out, or the feeling that there are already so many requirements when it comes to construction. You can't impose any more requirements. That's kind of the general tone in this council [...] (250715\_P19\_AM\_Transcription, Pos. 10) (City councillor)

There are also few building regulations instruments to enforce these design plans (P27, 114-118). Nevertheless, the city uses design plans when it comes to bringing together several owners for large-scale projects, as it is aware of the responsibility to coordinate large projects. From a private developer's perspective, the design plans would also be used more if they contained 'sensible' instruments (P23, 52-53), as one of the interviews mentioned:

But now, from our perspective as investors, it's always a bit... the whole political framework we have is relatively sluggish, sometimes not fully thought through, and we just take what we want to do. And if we see somewhere that it makes sense to create a little more green space, from the perspective that we can then create more attractive living space here and sell or rent it more easily, then we definitely do that. But at the end of the day, we have limited capital and we have to generate a return on that capital somewhere. And if we realise that the return is no longer interesting or no longer justified by the risk we are taking, then we stop investing. At least, we stop investing in real estate. (Private real estate firm representative)

According to private developers, communication with the municipality before and during the implementation of projects is good but they find it more difficult to negotiate with the cantonal authorities (P23, 80, 86-89, 105-112). Formal objections and the subsidiarity of different governance levels also complicate the construction process (P23, 105-107; P28, 29). Private stakeholders point at a trend towards more regulations, such as for example the cantonal requirements for the use of photovoltaics in new buildings and extensions, or the cantonal energy law, which is perceived as too strict (P23, 53-55; P25, 45-47; P55, 29-32). Local private stakeholders have a knowledge about green construction techniques are also incorporated but there are no firms specialising in green construction (P23, 61).

Local stakeholders are aware of the energy promotion programmes at both cantonal and municipal level (P26, 8, 20-21; P55, 56-57). Even though the municipal programme only offers minor subsidies, the municipality is said to maintain a 'lively communication' with the population on related issues (P26, 96), but how this communication is practiced concretely was not

specified. It is mentioned that municipal building regulations promote solar installations and green spaces (P27, 111-112). Starting from 2026 the amendment of the Swiss Electricity Act<sup>9</sup> will promote local energy communities (LEG), which could be particularly useful for the local economy, as argued by a member of the local trade association (P25, 27-36). Presently, excesses of solar electricity can be sold to other users of the grid, but to a limited geographical extent, i.e. only within the area of a few blocks. LEGs will allow users to buy and sell solar electricity within the whole municipal area.

### 3.3 (In)equity (distributional)

Evictions and displacement are not considered as a problem in Amriswil (P25, 139-140; P27, 91-92; P28, 61-62). Lower-income groups live in older, low-cost and lower-quality housing, of which there is a sufficient supply both in Amriswil (P23, 65-71; P25, 142-146; P55, 54-55, 64-65) as well as in surrounding municipalities (P27, 104-107). As the mayor explained:

I don't feel that socially acceptable or affordable housing is being built. I don't believe that. I believe more that people here still live in older properties that are more affordable. I believe that the new buildings that are being constructed are not affordable for these sections or classes of the population, the new ones here. I'm not aware of any projects being planned in Amriswil, such as cooperative housing or anything like that. So, these people are explicitly choosing to live in old properties, in old housing, which is simply cheaper. (Mayor)

As mentioned by private developers, older housing tends to be replaced rather than refurbished, as there is no large rent gap. Indeed, the difference between the current rents and the rents that could be potentially demanded after refurbishment are negligible (P23, 68-71). The building activities associated with densification are perceived as having a social impact to the extent that newly built dwellings are affordable only to somewhat higher-income households. In fact, over the last few years, housing prices have been constantly increasing, also in Amriswil (P27, 80-83).

Currently, according to a member of the city council, there is a high demand for places in retirement homes. The construction of 30 municipal retirement apartments was also discussed, particularly from an executive branch perspective (P19, 81; P27, 6). The rental prices are structured in such a way that an apartment can be financed with a minimum pension and additional social welfare benefits (*Ergänzungsleistungen*) (P27, 164-179). The retirement homes are managed as private companies, with the town holding the majority of the shares. There is also some private construction of retirement apartments that further covers the housing demand of the elderly population in Amriswil (P27, 63).

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<sup>9</sup> The Federal Energy Law was amended by the federal council in 2024 and was adopted at the beginning of 2025, with a second set of amendments coming into effect at the beginning of 2026. Key points are market-based return tariffs for solar power, the possibility of local energy communities, and winter bonuses for large photovoltaics system (UVEK, 2025).

Despite these new constructions, and even though some senior citizens tend to put their names in the waiting list several years before having a strict need for a place, the list has increased to around 150 places according to a public representative (P27, 85):

Of course, among the 150 people on the waiting list, there are always people who may be on it because it's too early or they're unsure. But we really got rid of these flats quickly. And that means we definitely have additional needs. (City councillor, conservative party)

Amriswil has seen a significant influx of senior citizens from surrounding municipalities (P55, 15, 4; P25, 133-134). This is also caused by the fact that Amriswil allows senior citizens from surrounding communities to move into their municipal retirement homes as well, a common practice in small(er) Swiss municipalities; however, until now, these have been allocated primarily to the local residents (P27, 14-18).

The perceived vicious cycle mentioned in Section 3.1 (cf. Fig. 8) can also be understood as some form of inequity; while it is not an immediate housing inequity, there exists some perception that it is a historical & geographical inequity that still has ramifications to this day and is – as was explained in the sections before – perceived as a burden for the city.

### 3.4 Political mobilization

Currently there is hardly any political mobilisation around housing issues in Amriswil (P23, 79-80; P25, 147-148, P27, 97-101, 153-157; P28, 63-64). Even when old buildings are being demolished, there are no protests from tenants, although observers cannot completely rule out the possibility that this is due to a lack of knowledge or time; however, it is argued, it is more likely that there are simply enough housing alternatives in Amriswil (P27, 153-157). According to the administration and the mayor, there are discussions among the inhabitants on the topic of growth (P26, 110-115; P55, 74-77, 80-81) and there are also discussions on densification, which basically tends to be approved, but when it affects people personally (e.g. new construction next to their own property) or older, historic buildings, some residents are divided as mentioned by administration representatives and by the mayor (P26, 174-178; P55, 80-81):

I would say less, but there is also resistance. For example, there are currently one or two new blocks that are really overshooting, in terms of height, [...] And some people think that's stupid, or that it's logical, or if you live next door, you probably think it's stupid. But basically, I think people still think it's good. [...] I keep hearing that we have so few historic buildings or something like that. If we tear them down, then we'll have nothing left. [...] I can understand that. But I think that's something that no one on the conservative side is trying to prevent, at least for now. (Administrational representative)

Green issues are somewhat discussed by the population but remain largely a concern of the administration and executive. For example, a representative of a political party and a member of administration mentioned that whether to retain the Energy City label was discussed on several occasions at the municipal level, but these discussions were hardly noticed by the population (P26, 84-85; P27, 108-109).

So it's not controversial, no, it's not widely discussed, I would say. I think a lot of people don't even think about this issue. (Representative of conservative party, Municipal Council)

Ecological issues did not gain much attention, not even after the greening of the city, as they are often considered 'luxury problems', as noted by a member of the administration (P26, 167-169). A civic-society representative stated that in particular lower-income people do not have the time and/or inclination to reflect on ecological and social issues (P28, 40-42). However, specific restrictions, such as the loss of parking spaces during the redesign of the railway station, led to heated discussions in the population (P19, 100-101; P27, 141).

Likewise, the greening efforts of the government did not lead to a change in the views of the residents, as stated by the mayor (P55, 44-45). From the perspective of some progressive members of the executive, the politically conservative city is basically oriented in favour of private transport and rejects effective green measures (P19, 15-16, 50-52, 58). One of the civic-society interviewees relates the lack of political discussion in general to the lack of a parliament in Amriswil (P28, 85-86, 90-91):

Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that I think people need to be more involved in politics. And for me, that means that a town like Amriswil, with 15,000 inhabitants, should have a parliament. But we don't. [...] I just feel that for a broader discussion about where Amriswil should go from here and how it should move forward, I think a parliament would be a better way to engage people. And one reason why I founded [...] an association is simply because I feel, how else can we become politically active? [...] And perhaps it also has to do with the fact that Amriswil didn't really see itself as a town, but rather as a large village. And that is definitely over now. We also have urban problems [...] Awareness is perhaps less than I would like it to be; less than in other towns of similar size. [...] There is the municipal assembly, right? [For the budget], for example, and it usually goes smoothly and, of course, a vote is taken. As a rule, it goes through smoothly. [...] That's certainly good, but what I find lacking are the visions, the perspectives, when it really comes down to the experiences or even the trend we have seen in recent decades, that we are always lagging behind others in terms of development and finances. How can we tackle this, perhaps even make a new start? That's what I find lacking a little. (Civic Society representative)

### 3.5 Social impacts (positive & negative)

As was mentioned earlier, there are no large green transition projects in Amriswil. Accordingly, only few social impacts were mentioned, even though we explicitly asked interviewees about their perception of EEPs negative impacts. Indeed, practically nobody gave a concise answer regarding this topic. Most of the answers referred to some general social impacts, which are listed below, but did not explicitly mention any particular EEP as responsible for them.

In Amriswil so far there has not been any NBS project with a tangible impact on a specific neighbourhood and its inhabitants, as the only greening measures that are currently being implemented, such as for example the distribution of trees at subsidized prices and the subsidies for greening housing facades, are rather minor and distributed in the municipality's whole territory. The greening of the city through the 'Vorteil Naturnah' project (see Chapter

1.2.3) was well received, as members of the city administration and a government official commented (P19, 49-50; P26, 71-75). A representative of a real-estate firm expressed the feeling that the implementation of NBS created aesthetically pleasing environments, which could lead to easier letting (P23, 56-57).

Through the construction of retirement homes, more housing for the elderly population could be created (P19, 81; P55, 91) All in all, it was also expressed that there was a satisfactory amount of living space in Amriswil (P26, 187-189):

Well, we have extremely affordable flats [...] you can get really good flats at the moment, at affordable prices [...] I can see that there is an extremely large supply of flats and a lot of construction is still going on. (Administrational representative)

## 3.6 Tensions and contradictions according to different stakeholders

### 3.6.1 Perception of contradictions by different actors

During the interviews, some tensions between EEPs and other goals were mentioned by private and private-civic society stakeholders.<sup>10</sup> A central concern was the profitability of real estate and its costs in relation to various other issues. These included the increase of costs caused by the large number of regulations (P23, 53; P25, 63-67, 84-85; P55, 97) and by green measures (P23, 98) and the large number of formal objections against new developments (P23, 105-107). In addition, the rent increase when refurbishing older housing that can be asked from tenants is quite low, thus demolition and rebuilding is often considered more profitable, as will be further explained below. These additional costs, especially those for green measures, have an impact on rents and accordingly are only considered worthwhile if there were financial incentives for their implementation, as argued by a real-estate firm (P23, 58-59). This is a 'balancing act', especially in the case of housing for vulnerable groups, such as urban retirement homes, which must be profitable despite their low rents (P27, 89):

[...] I'd say that a certain standard of construction requires a certain level of quality. But also that it should not be gold plated, that it should remain affordable. And, of course, we have to calculate so that we can get through but not make too much profit. And that is, of course, a balancing act when we also say that we do not want to finance retirement homes with taxpayers' money, but that they should be self-supporting. Then we build our own buildings. (Representative of conservative party, Municipal Council)

A member of the administration mentioned that the implementation of green measures could also increase the attractiveness of the properties, which would also lead to higher returns and attract better taxpayers (P26, 143-146).

Another topic concerns the acceptance of densification. On this issue a private representative argued that individual residents still have to accept to prioritise public interest over their individual ones. It is also acknowledged that more densely built new dwellings will be more

<sup>10</sup> One interviewee representing the trade association (*Gewerbeverein*) spoke with a double role of private entrepreneur and is thus referred to as belonging to the category 'private-civic'.

expensive (P23, 55, 102) (see quote below). Furthermore, a civic representatives mentioned that population growth related to densification would lead to more traffic problems (P28, 57-58).

And you can't expect that if you build a new building on it, I'll still be able to rent the 4.5-room flat for 1'000.- afterwards. [...] [I]n the end, you also have the entire building stock, which would then have to be halted. So, I can't say that I want to bring the building stock up to scratch, but I don't want to give notice of termination, because that's simply not possible. [...] There is no alternative, [...] but when you look at the big picture, yes, it's the same thing: everyone talks about densification, but not in my backyard. If I have a beautiful view of the lake, then I don't want a high-rise building to be built in front of it. But somewhere we have a design plan, a zoning plan, and if we say we don't want to expand further into green spaces, into agricultural land, then we have to densify the inner city. (Private real estate firm representative)

Individual tensions surrounding the issue of densification were also mentioned by a private stakeholder: on the one hand, excessive densification would not be readily accepted by the inhabitants (P23, 32-35), while on the other hand, individual needs might have to be put on hold, for example by restricting formal objections to speed up the proves of granting building permits (P23, 102).

### 3.6.2 Stakeholder dynamics

Private stakeholders are mainly concerned about the profit that can be extracted from their properties. Energy refurbishments of old properties generally not considered worthwhile, as tenants, more than for improved energy efficiency, are only willing to pay higher rents for better floor plans and fittings, which can usually only be met by demolition and new construction (P23, 98). Renovations would also hardly be worthwhile due to the low rent gap, i.e. the negligible difference between the current rent and the potentially achievable rent (P23, 38-40). In addition, densification projects would be initiated where they would be financially worthwhile (P23, 47-48). Investors therefore prefer to purchase single-family homes in areas where densification is possible (P27, 198-201). The mayor of Amriswil pointed out that large construction projects are usually purchased by institutional investors, but only if they can be acquired on a turnkey basis from developers, i.e. as an already fully planned project (P55, 103-104, P23, 47-48).

Due to the city's small size, members of the administration maintain that there are no large contiguous areas undergoing gentrification (P26, 139-140) but moderate price increases can be observed in proximity to the railway station (P27, 91-94).

## 3.7 Innovative governance mechanisms

### 3.7.1 Perceptions of green policies

This section focuses on the projects and mechanisms deployed by the local administration. As no larger EEP projects have so far been implemented in Amriswil, this section takes a broader approach by focusing on the mentioned smaller projects that fall into the scope of NBS or 'green policies', as mostly conceived by local stakeholders.

A project that was mentioned by the administration and public officials was the general greening of the city of Amriswil (P26, 42-48; P55, 39-43) subsidized by the canton in the framework of the '*Vorteil Naturnah*' programme (P19, 20-33, cf. Chapter 1.2.3). A landscape architect has carried out a study to assess the feasibility of related measures in various locations in Amriswil (P26, 42-48; P55, 43). This triggered a debate in the administration about the need for such measures. Those supporting the greening had to convince the sceptics, as exemplified by this quote:

First, we had to convince our city gardeners and our maintenance depot that green spaces can be designed in a simple and inexpensive way and, above all, with low maintenance. That, in addition to simply looking good, it also makes an important contribution and has benefits for nature and the environment. Simply convincing them internally of the advantages. I think that was a challenge. (Mayor)

It was also important to communicate the advantages of the greening measures to the inhabitants, as a public official detailed:

I think externally it was simply a matter of persuasion and perhaps also certain myths that needed to be debunked or concerns that needed to be allayed. Or perhaps simply backing it up with facts: it requires less effort. It looks good at some point, maybe not right away at the beginning. It has to grow and come to life first. And I think that convincing people of certain prejudices and myths took time to convince them that it wasn't insanely expensive. It's also about cost-benefit. [...] And this relationship, this area of tension, simply needs to be accompanied and demonstrated through communication and examples. (Mayor)

One of the city's concrete instruments is the discounted sale of plants to residents. According to members of the municipality this programme has received very good responses, (P19, 30-33; P26, 73-75; P27, 109) and is considered efficient as it requires little effort (P26, 103). Another instrument is the Energy City label (c.f. 1.2.2), which the city has received, among other things, for the construction of district heating and battery storage facilities (P28, 40-44). However, there are currently no further projects within the framework of the Energy City label (P28, 40-44).

## 3.8 Market pressures and competing local topics

### 3.8.1 Housing market in Amriswil

A key issue in relation to the property market – mentioned by all interviewees – is the rise in land prices, even if moderate compared to other locations in Switzerland and not limited to a specific area in Amriswil (P19, 77-79; P27, 81-83; P28, 16). One civic-society interviewee thinks that this might be related to the growing role of institutional investors in the Amriswil property market (P28, 16). We could not find any concrete evidence to support this hypothesis even though this is a well-known trend all over Switzerland.

According to a representative of a private real-estate firm, rising prices in larger, more central cities have led to a slight increase in the number of people looking for housing in Amriswil (P23, 81-82). Above all, however, detached single family houses are becoming more expensive and less common, with more apartment buildings being built instead (P27, 20, 27, 31-33).

Apartments, no. We have quite a lot of those. In fact, I would say we have a surplus. There are also many condominiums still under construction. Houses are certainly problematic, because many people, especially young families, still want to have a detached house. That's the dream of a house and garden. Yes, but it's becoming increasingly difficult because supply is simply declining and certainly not increasing. (Representative of conservative party, Municipal Council)

This, combined with uncertainties in the financial market, is leading to an increase in condominium ownership, which is also more profitable for developers, as maintained by a local real estate firm (P23, 90-95) who also argued that expert assessments on rental prices in Switzerland, for example those of Wüst Partner<sup>11</sup>, do not always reflect the reality in Amriswil as they are often overrated because they do not consider the local market conditions, which play a decisive role (P23, 32-35, 110-112).

A private stakeholder also mentioned a form of “parallel housing market”: in his view, roughly 10% of construction projects are undertaken by companies owned by migrants from the Balkan region. These companies often carry out rapid renovations of older housing, to be rented out primarily to Balkan emigrants (P25, 185-220). While this interviewee assumed that this housing was relatively inexpensive, a city council member noted that prices were not always low, as some of these “Balkan projects” also consist of entirely new construction. (P55, 82-87).

## 3.9 Expectations for future development

Several among our interviewees in Amriswil made some predictions related to factors affecting the future housing conditions, such as population growth, building activities, and housing prices. Accordingly, in this last section we focus primarily on included these predictions.

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<sup>11</sup> Wüest Partner is a company that offers real estate valuation, consulting services, and data related to the real estate market. Founded in Zurich, it has become the market leader across Switzerland.

Most respondents recognise Amriswil's potential for densification in the future (P26, 174-176), as well as the possible benefit of renewing the city centre (P28, 77). Interviewees also believe that the city will continue to grow in the coming years (P55, 16). However, the implementation of densification projects, such as *Bahnhofstrasse*, will take several more years, as noted in Section 3.1.2 (P23, 14-28).

The wishes of the interviewed stakeholders are sometimes very different. Private developers advocate for more restrictions on the submission of formal objections (P23, 105), while civic society representatives would like to see greater coherence and efficiency in discussions between different governance levels (cantonal – municipal) (P28, 33-34). The local trade association (*Gewerbeverein*) criticises the lack of training and support regarding green transformation, the lack of support in pressing issues such as rising electricity prices<sup>12</sup> and expressed the desire for more training and support on green transformation (P25, 241-242).

Some members of the government of the right-leaning SVP party expressed the desire for less interference in the planning and implementation of local projects by higher governance levels (canton/federal government) (P27, 163; P55, 94-97). On the other hand, left-leaning members of government and administration tend to long for higher-level planning, guidelines and stricter rules (P19, 103-111) or at least for assistance, even though they agree that implementation should always remain within the municipal authority (P26, 164-165):

We have building regulations, for example, and sometimes I wish there were stricter measures in place. Energy legislation, green spaces – I would like to see more regulations so that we don't always have to have discussions at municipal level, but given the high value placed on municipal autonomy in Thurgau, this is just my personal wish and not shared by everyone. (City Councillor)

More support from the canton in the form of resources would strengthen the implementation of energy refurbishments and NBS in the city (P26, 156). Furthermore, some members of the administration would like to see a stronger enforcement of green measures in design plans (P26, 94). However, according to a member of the administration, this should be implemented through incentives rather than strict regulations (98-103). However, these incentives would have to be revised on a regular basis (P26).

Other more specific wishes expressed by the interviewed stakeholders refer to everyday issues related to the central tax-issue discussed in Chapter 3.1.1: promoting a more vibrant city and thus attracting better tax payers (P26, 146; P28, 77), improving the situation for active mobility (P19, 118-119, P28), creating more areas on public land that are climate- and biodiversity-friendly (P26, 55-57), or creating high-wage jobs in the region (P28, 47; P55, 23).

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<sup>12</sup> This was in relation to the electricity price increases across Switzerland and Europe from 2022 onwards, which have fallen slightly again since then (Eidgenössische Elektrizitätskommission, 2025).

## 4 Critical Analysis: Amriswil

### 4.1 Green transition initiatives and housing inequalities

Amriswil, situated in Eastern Switzerland and with a historical legacy of low-wage industries, is characterised by a housing market with comparatively low pressure. Basically, all interviewees agree that there is enough affordable housing and different housing segments cater to different needs and levels in willingness to pay. Affordability is not perceived as an issue, not even in relation to green transition initiatives. On the contrary, there is hope that measures in the framework of environmental and energy policies could contribute to upgrading the existing building stock and help attract more affluent households and thus increase tax revenue – a key concern that will be further developed below.

Displacement or any other forms of housing inequalities were hardly mentioned. In fact, responses to related questions often diverted to other issues, presumably because housing is not widely discussed in Amriswil and does not feature in debates within the city council or the administration. Socio-spatial differences between different neighbourhoods in Amriswil were barely mentioned. In fact, the absence of housing debates and political mobilisation around related topics is one of the key findings of our research in this small city. According to our interviewees, green transition initiatives had no substantial impact on housing inequalities, at least so far. However, it was mentioned, albeit not in connection with housing inequalities or green initiatives, that new buildings are primarily inhabited by households with higher incomes while lower-income households tend to live in older properties. This potentially reflects housing inequalities in the form of lower-quality housing. Furthermore, inequalities exist between Amriswil and surrounding, more attractive municipalities. This reflects socio-spatial inequalities at regional level with more affluent households choosing to live in more attractive municipalities with negative social and fiscal consequences on Amriswil. The absence of (negative) impacts of green transition initiatives on housing inequalities needs to be put into a broader perspective: what has been implemented so far is relatively limited and diffused over the whole territory. Furthermore, we also observed a reservation towards the implementation of environmental and energy policies enforced by higher levels of government (Canton of Thurgau or the Swiss Confederation). This can be traced back to the political orientation of the municipality, a lack of resources (financial as well as personnel), and a certain dependency on the private market.

When it comes to energy refurbishments, there is a fundamental tension between the costs of energy refurbishments and a slack housing market that does not allow tangible rent increases. Due to a low rent gap, landlords don't consider renovations as profitable. In fact, the potential rent that could be demanded for renovated apartments is reportedly not sufficiently high to compensate the renovation costs. Overall, the offered subsidies are not sufficient to change this situation substantially as they cover at best 50% of the refurbishment costs (BFE & EnFK, 2016). Moreover, if tenants are willing to pay a higher price for a renovated flat, they often have higher expectations in terms of floor plans and fittings that cannot be met by the old building stock. Landlords therefore prefer demolition and new construction, particularly in areas where densification is possible. Factors affecting energy refurbishments beyond the economic one (ecological, social) are hardly discussed.

As energy refurbishments for apartment buildings are not profitable in Amriswil, it is likely that the bulk of subsidies is granted the owners of single-family homes, which potentially reinforces inequalities between homeowners and tenants. While data for Amriswil lacks, national data shows that around 50% of the subsidies are allocated to the renovation of single-family homes (BFE, 2025a).

Densification in Amriswil, as in all of Switzerland, is regulated by the Spatial Planning Act. With its revision in 2014, densification became mandatory for cantons and municipalities. The municipality of Amriswil is actively steering densification through its building regulations, the zoning plan of 2020, and designated areas where high-rise buildings are possible. Especially around the area of the train station, the municipality promotes a higher density with a more urban flair. To this aim, it purchased properties so that it can have a stronger influence on the development of the area. These properties will later be sold again to private investors.

Generally, densification is well accepted in Amriswil, although it should be mentioned that so far it only occurred on a moderate scale, as other places promise higher returns on densification projects. Also, in Amriswil there have been cases of NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard, i.e. resistance to a development locally while approving of the project more generally). Overall, Amriswil remains a town with a relatively low density with plans for moderate densification in the centre and along traffic corridors.

As for NBS, there are some efforts by the municipality to make urban open spaces in Amriswil more biodiverse, and to provide incentives for owners of private gardens to remove stone gardens and neophytes and replace them with plants promoting biodiversity. These measures can be seen as low-risk, low-cost measures that do not interfere with the private market and raise few concerns among Amriswil's population as they are not considered to influence housing inequalities. NBS subsidies so far benefit primarily the owners of detached single-family houses with private gardens rather than tenants, but they are currently being supported at a scale that they are not being perceived as reinforcing inequalities between homeowners and tenants. If having any social impact at all, the greening measures are thought to potentially increase property values, which is generally regarded as positive since the town tries to attract more affluent households for tax reasons.

## 4.2 Role of the municipality and the private market

Amriswil is largely seen as a peripheral town in the network of cities in Switzerland, but one that has nevertheless the role of a small centre for its region, providing functions and services (e.g. a care centre for the elderly) that are not available in the surrounding villages. This, however, is perceived as a burden for the municipality, as it generates costs. At the same time, Amriswil is not as attractive as other municipalities in the region and therefore fails to attract more affluent households. In Switzerland's tax system, municipalities directly benefit from income taxes. Accordingly, Amriswil's government aims to boost the town's tax revenues by attracting companies in higher-paying sectors and by creating an environment appealing to higher-income households. However, the municipality as a public actor plays only a marginal role in urban development, essentially limited to planning. When it comes to actual development, the municipality depends on private actors. Investors consider profitability

across regions, and as Amriswil appears less promising, especially in comparison to towns in the agglomeration of Zurich, the municipality does not want to deter private actors who *are* willing to invest in Amriswil. This leads to a situation in which the municipality is reluctant to impose excessive regulation on the private market (e.g. by requesting additional benefits to the municipality in design plans, as other cities, such as for example St.Gallen and Zurich, do.<sup>13</sup>

There is some speculation that the very tight housing market in Zurich could at some point in time benefit Amriswil as it may motivate households unable to find suitable and affordable housing in Zurich to divert their search to more distant places that are well connected to Zurich by train, such as Amriswil. This would generate the much-needed tax revenue for the municipality, indicating that a crisis in one city or region could become an opportunity for another.

In contrast to the strong role of the private market, the non-profit housing sector is only marginally present in Amriswil where the only housing cooperative was not mentioned by anyone. Indeed, many interviewees even reported that there was no non-profit housing sector in Amriswil at all. The cooperative itself was not available for an interview. This suggests that the only housing cooperative in Amriswil has a different role from the one commonly attributed to cooperatives in the Swiss housing system, namely providing affordable, non-commodifiable housing to lower-income and middle-class households.

It should be noted that the municipality of Amriswil is not actively providing housing (besides affordable housing for the elderly), nor does it have a municipal housing policy. A more active stance in shaping the housing stock in Amriswil using for example land leases under building rights or instruments to support non-profit housing providers (as, for example, observed in St.Gallen with its municipal housing strategy<sup>14</sup>) might be useful to ensure affordable housing for lower-income households. However, Amriswil seems to be in a situation where the housing market is functioning well enough that the local authorities do not face pressure to intervene.

Regarding housing policy as well as EEPs, there are diverging views on multi-level governance. While most interviewees maintain that the implementation of policies should primarily happen at municipal level, interviewees from the right of the political spectrum advocate for less or no regulations in planning and construction from higher governance levels whereas more progressive actors would welcome more support, incentives or regulations from the Canton of Thurgau or the Confederation.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Overall, Amriswil is a small town with a housing market that basically satisfies the needs of different types of households, with no reports of housing shortages, affordability problems, or other forms of housing inequalities. Amriswil is neither affected by the pressure from a growing population due to a flourishing economy such as Zurich and surrounding regions<sup>15</sup>, nor affected

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<sup>13</sup> See case study reports on St.Gallen and Zurich.

<sup>14</sup> See case study report on St.Gallen.

<sup>15</sup> See case study report on Zurich.

by tourism as many of Switzerland's alpine regions. Amriswil is representative for many other municipalities in Eastern Switzerland<sup>16</sup>, where housing remains affordable due to low demand. It could be hypothesized, however, that once the housing crisis in the Zurich region spreads even further and also the housing market in Amriswil comes under greater pressure), housing inequalities might rise.

Being in competition with other municipalities, there is a general view that Amriswil is disadvantaged in terms of location and environmental qualities in spite of the central functions it assumes for the whole region. Like in St.Gallen<sup>17</sup>, there is a wish to attract households with higher incomes to strengthen the tax base. In this sense, Amriswil is a typical example of a Swiss municipality outside the larger, economically successful urban centres and the tourist regions, whose relative lack of attractiveness, the low municipal tax revenue, the related dependency private actors, and the conservative political orientation limits public influence on housing.

With regard to EEPs, we conclude that even though there are many policies in place – not least the ones mandated by higher levels of governance – many of them remain ineffective in Amriswil (and presumably many other small and peripheral towns) where the low rent gap discourages the private sector from refurbishment investments, and constrains local government to act due to the relatively small tax revenue. Often, the local government's focus does not lie on EEPs as other topics such as the municipal tax income or mobility infrastructure are prioritised.

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<sup>16</sup> See also case study report on St.Gallen.

<sup>17</sup> See case study report on St.Gallen.

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## 6 Appendix 1 – Glossary

### Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name
APZ	Alters- und Pflegezentrum Amriswil; care center for the elderly and disabled
EEP	Environmental and energy policy
FDP	FDP.Die Liberalen; The Liberals (economic-liberal party)
NBS	Nature-based solutions
SP	Sozialdemokratische Partei; Social Democratic Party
SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei; Swiss People's Party (national-conservative party)

### Terms and Concepts

Term/concept	Explanation
Cantonal structure plan	<i>Richtplan</i> ; cantonal planning tool, specifying zoning
Design plan	<i>Gestaltungsplan</i> ; is established in a cooperative planning procedure between private developers and the municipal authorities. It can contain benefits for developers (e.g. higher density) in exchange for contributions of public interest (e.g. public spaces).
Energy City label	<i>Energiestadt-Label</i> ; national label awarded to municipalities that make efforts in the field of local energy and climate policy
Housing Promotion Agency	<i>Wohnbauförderung</i> ; federal housing promotion, distributed by the cantons
Spatial Planning Act	<i>Raumplanungsgesetz</i> ; federal law introduced in 1979; in 2014, densification was introduced as a mandatory principle for cantons and municipalities

## 7 Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts

# <sup>18</sup>	Position of Interviewee	Sector	Organisation	Date of interview	Media
P19	Member of city council	Public actor	City council, Green Party	08.07.25	online
P23	Representative of local real estate firm	Private actor	Real estate firm <i>thoma Immobilien</i>	10.07.25	online
P25	Representative of local trade association	Private actor	Trade association <i>Gewerbeverein Amriswil</i>	22.07.25	in person
P26	Representative of city administration, responsible for environmental issues	Administrational actor	Responsible for environmental and energy issues	22.07.25	in person
P27	Member of city council	Public actor	City council, <i>SVP Amriswil</i>	22.07.25	in person
P28	Representative of local cycling association	Civic actor	<i>IG Velo Amriswil</i>	24.07.25	online
P30	Representative of cantonal administration, responsible for housing promotion	Administrational actor	Housing Promotion Agency	12.06.25	telephone
P34	Representative of tenants' union	Civic actor	Tenant's Association Eastern Switzerland	31.07.25	online
P55	Mayor	Public actor	City council	20.10.25	in person

<sup>18</sup> Gaps appear in the interviewee numbering because interviewees were numbered continuously across the three case studies Amriswil, St.Gallen and Zurich.

