



REDUCING  
HOUSING  
INEQUALITIES



## Case Study Working Paper: Vienna (Austria)

*An extract from Deliverable 5.1, 'Case study reports on green transition initiatives and their impact on housing inequalities,' of the ReHousIn project*

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Author(s)	Michael Friesenecker, Judith M. Lehner, Nina Lobnig (TU Wien) (TU Wien)
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The ReHousIn project aims to spark innovative policy solutions towards inclusionary and quality housing. To achieve this, it investigates the complex relationship between green transition initiatives and housing inequalities in European urban and rural contexts and develops innovative policy recommendations for better and context-sensitive integration between environmentally sustainable interventions and socially inclusive housing.

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# 1 Introduction

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

Vienna, with a population of 2,028,289 residents as of 1 January 2025, is not only the largest city in Austria but also a central node in the country's economy and urban system (City of Vienna - MA23, 2025a). As the national capital, Vienna is a key hub for services, culture, administration and international connectivity and hosts a bit more than one-fifth of Austria's population. Politically, since 1945, the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) has continuously been in power. In the last regional elections, the party secured 39.4 % of the vote in the April 2025, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) more than doubled its share to around 20.4 %, followed by the Green Party (14,5%), Neos (10,0%) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) (9,7%) (City of Vienna - MA23, 2025a).

Administratively, Vienna is both a federal province and a municipality. Furthermore, Vienna is divided into 23 municipal districts (Bezirke). Following the decentralisation reform in 1989, the Viennese districts have sole responsibility for maintaining public schools and kindergartens, as well as for street and green space maintenance, including greening public spaces and renovating existing urban parks. To perform these responsibilities, a budget is allocated through a complex financial allocation mechanism that considers factors such as the number of children and pupils, the area of streets, and the hours spent on maintaining trees and green spaces, among others.

In terms of climate vulnerability, Vienna's location in the low-lying Vienna Basin along the Danube River and its dense urban structure contribute to heightened climate vulnerability, particularly for heat waves (Smida et al., 2019), as built surfaces such as concrete and asphalt trap and radiate heat more than surrounding rural areas, creating a pronounced urban heat island effect (City of Vienna, 2025a). Long-term monitoring by the City of Vienna shows that mean annual air temperatures have increased by nearly 3°C since the 1970s, intensifying extremes such as heatwaves and the number of hot days that disproportionately affect urban populations, especially in heavily built-up districts with low vegetation cover (City of Vienna, 2025a). Analyses of Vienna's urban climate demonstrate that the spatial distribution of heat vulnerability correlates with population density and age structure, indicating that the city's geography interacts with demographic factors to influence climate risk (Setz et al., 2021).

In terms of age structure, approximately 14 % of residents are aged 0–14, about 69 % are of working age (15–64) and around 17 % are aged 65 or older, indicating both a strong working-age base and a significant older population share (City of Vienna - MA23, 2025b). Over the past decade, continued population growth, primarily driven by migration, has slightly increased the proportion of young and working-age adults, while the share of older residents has also gradually risen, pointing to ongoing demographic ageing (Statistik Austria, 2024). Non-Austrian citizens constitute a substantial portion of the population: as of early 2025, 36.4% of Vienna's residents held foreign citizenship, 40.9% were born abroad, and 46.3% had a migration background (City of Vienna – MA23, 2025b). In six municipal districts, including Favoriten (since 2021), more than half of the population has a foreign origin.

This demographic structure is closely linked to Vienna's economic structure, as the city's service-oriented labour market, particularly in sectors such as tourism, health, care, retail, and business services, creates sustained employment opportunities that attract and absorb a large share of the migrant working-age population. Vienna's economy is dominated by the service sector, which accounts for over 85% of its economic output and underpins the city's role as Austria's primary economic hub, generating roughly a quarter of the nation's total GDP despite occupying only 0.5 % of the country's land area (Wirtschaftskammer Wien, 2025). Tourism is a key part of this service-oriented structure: in 2024, the city recorded a record 18.9 million overnight stays and substantial revenue growth compared to 2023, and tourism-related activity supports significant value-added and year-round employment, illustrating a considerable and growing contribution to Vienna's economy (Vienna Tourist Board, 2025).

At the same time, Vienna's recent labour market transformation has been described by Riederer, Verwiebe, and Ahn (2021) as "asymmetrical polarisation". While professionalisation, the expansion of higher-skilled, knowledge-intensive service occupations, has been the dominant structural trend, a parallel, though less pronounced, growth in lower-paid and more precarious service employment has contributed to widening income gaps. In this sense, Vienna's employment structure has shifted upward overall, yet inequality has increased at the margins. This dynamic is reflected in marked sectoral income differences: average annual gross incomes of full-time employees are substantially higher in finance, information and communication, and specialised professional services, while significantly lower in hospitality, retail, and personal services (Statistik Wien, 2026a). Income inequalities further intersect with migration background, as persons of non-EU origin are overrepresented in the lowest income quintile, and about 7 % of Vienna's population relies on minimum social security benefits (Stadt Wien, 2023, p. 122). Income disparities also display a pronounced spatial dimension, with full-time gross annual incomes in central districts such as Innere Stadt (€67,300) and Josefstadt (52,300€) as well as the Western districts at the slopes of the Wienerwald (e.g. Hietzing with 53,630€) substantially exceeding the average income of more working class oriented districts like Favoriten and Simmering in the South (around €36,000) and the relatively central Brigittenau (36,700€), underscoring spatial income gradients within Vienna (Statistik Wien, 2026b).

## Housing

In contrast to the national average, the Viennese housing market is dominated by the rental segment, with 78% of the population renting their apartments. The housing system in Vienna is characterised by a multi-segment structure comprising a large, publicly regulated social housing sector, a subsidised limited-profit cooperative segment, and a private market rental and owner-occupier segment. For decades, the city has maintained a substantial municipal housing stock (Gemeindebau) alongside limited-profit associations (LPHA) that build and manage housing under tight cost-rent regulation. The social housing sector (municipal and limited-profit housing stock) accounts for roughly 40% of Vienna's housing stock of around one million units (with a primary residency as shown in Table 1). About 21 per cent of this stock is owned by LPHA, and municipal units own 22 per cent. Another essential housing segment is the private rental sector, which accounts for 39% of the stock – with 24% rent-regulated apartments in buildings built before 1945 – and 15% of private rental stock where the rent is not regulated. Furthermore, approximately 17% are owner-occupied, comprising 11% condominiums and 7% single-family houses.

Table 1. Vienna: Housing Market Segments - 2021

	Persons		Dwelling stock Total		Dwelling stock Main Residencies	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Owner-occupation</b>	349 039	<b>18.6</b>	<b>158 377</b>	<b>14.7</b>	158 377	<b>17.1</b>
House	132 757	7.1	57 263	5.3	57 263	6.2
Apartment	216 282	11.5	101 114	9.4	101 114	10.9
<b>Rental</b>	<b>1 461 422</b>	<b>77.7</b>	<b>731 954</b>	<b>68.1</b>	<b>731 954</b>	<b>79.0</b>
<i>Private Rental</i>	699 167	37.2	361 485	33.6	361 485	39.0
rent-regulated	425 992	22.6	221 293	20.6	221 293	23.9
free market	273 175	14.5	140 192	13.0	140 192	15.1
<i>Social Rental</i>	762 255	40.5	370 469	34.5	370 469	40.0
Publicly Owned**	440 751	23.4	207 144	19.3	207 144	22.4
Limited-profit Owned	321 504	17.1	163 325	15.2	163 325	17.6
<b>Other</b>	<b>71 136</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>36 449</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>36 449</b>	<b>3.9</b>
<b>Total (Main Residencies)</b>	<b>1 881 597</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>926 780</b>	<b>86.2</b>	<b>926780</b>	<b>100</b>
Second or Non-Residencies	-	-	<b>148 187</b>	<b>13.8</b>	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	-	<b>1 074 967</b>	<b>100</b>	-	-

\*in primary residences; \*\*owned by municipalities (in German *Gemeindebauten*)

Source: compiled by authors, data from: STATcube – Statistical Database of Statistics Austria

Apart from the national legal framework on housing (Rental Act, Condominium law), Vienna as a federal province regulates its housing production and subsidies via the Vienna Housing Promotion and Housing Rehabilitation Act (WWFSG), which contains provisions for brick and mortar subsidies (construction of new housing and refurbishment of existing residential buildings) and regulates the benefits disbursed to tenants (individual subsidies, housing allowances). The laws of the federal provincial government determine the type and extent of earmarked support granted to housing developers (e.g., low-interest loans, investment grants, and contributions). Out of the total budget of the City of Vienna (total payments as recorded in 2024) of €19.9 billion, 21% is allocated to social welfare and housing promotion (City of Vienna, MA23, 2025a). For the housing promotion subsidies of approximately €530 million, €232 million is dedicated to subsidised new construction, €148 million to subsidised refurbishments, and €150 million to individual benefits (housing allowances) (City of Vienna - MA23, 2025a).

By maintaining its municipal social rental system and supporting limited-profit housing associations (LPHA) through bricks-and-mortar subsidies, Kadi and Lilius (2022) highlight the stability of the social housing segment in Vienna compared with other cities, illustrating that it remains a backbone of the city's housing regime. However, over the last 30 years, governance reforms at the federal state level have simultaneously led to an increasingly deregulated private rental market (Friesenecker & Kazepov, 2021; Kadi, 2025).

Hence, key issues emerging in Vienna's housing system include tenure segmentation, spatial inequality, and the risk of exclusion in the private rental market. Friesenecker & Kazepov (2021) argue that while Vienna's inclusive strategy aims to avoid spatial isolation of disadvantaged groups, the shift towards a more deregulated private rental market has

introduced new forms of exclusion and access barriers. Kadi (2025) notes that, despite the remarkable stability of social housing, emerging pressures such as rising rents in the private sector and eligibility restrictions for new immigrants are increasingly shaping debates over access. Thus, the discourse includes concerns about whether newcomers, lower-income households or migrant families are effectively locked out of social housing and pushed into more precarious tenure. The private rental market now exerts greater pressure on households through rising rents and reduced long-term security, thereby creating displacement risks despite the large share of social housing.

Districts differ significantly in terms of size, density, housing segments, and socioeconomic composition. Socio-spatial inequalities are closely tied to the distribution of access to different housing sectors across its districts. Inner districts within and around the Gürtel have undergone gentrification and rising rents, resulting in a greater concentration of high-status groups with higher levels of education and income. These areas became less accessible for lower-income and newcomer populations after rent deregulation and the financialisation of housing. Outer districts, especially in the north-eastern and southern parts of the city, contain large municipal housing estates and limited-profit housing, where low-income and vulnerable groups are disproportionately represented. While these areas preserve a broad social mix, some show signs of residualisation, with increasing concentrations of disadvantaged residents. The western outskirts and central historical zones remain wealthier. In contrast, the belt around the Gürtel and older private rental areas continue to function as arrival zones for migrants and low-skilled newcomers. Overall, segregation between high- and low-status groups has slightly decreased, with a more even distribution across districts. Vienna thus maintains relatively low segregation levels, but subtle east–west and centre–periphery socio-spatial divides remain.

### **Green Transition policies**

Vienna’s environmental policy evolved over the past three decades through a combination of local innovation and multi-level governance coordination. The city’s environmental strategy originated in 1979 with the creation of the Department of Environmental Protection, establishing a social–ecological model centred on quality of life, social justice, and resource conservation. This framework was institutionalised in the 1980s through urban planning focused on dense development, public transport, and green spaces.

From 1989 to 1999, key turning points, such as the fall of the Iron Curtain, EU accession, and membership in the Climate Alliance (1991), prompted Vienna to link its local ecological agenda to global environmental goals. The Climate Protection Programme (KliP), launched in 1999, introduced 300 concrete measures across energy, mobility and housing. During the 2000s, sustainability became the city’s guiding principle, and managerial coordination was strengthened through the Coordination Office for Climate Protection, which implemented interdepartmental cooperation, annual evaluations, and reporting.

Over time, Vienna’s approach shifted toward techno-managerial, efficiency-oriented solutions, particularly in energy and housing, influenced by EU directives and national legislation, such as the 2009 Article 15a Agreement on building emissions. The *Smart City Wien Framework Strategy* (2014) integrated technological innovation with long-standing social and ecological principles, coordinating multiple actors—municipal departments, public utilities, research institutions, and businesses—through the Smart City Wien Agency. This framework strategy was later revised into the *Smart Climate City Strategy Vienna* (2022), which included the goal

of climate neutrality by 2040 and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) of the UN Agenda 2030.

Vienna's governance model remains highly centralised and hierarchical, with limited public participation, yet it benefits from substantial municipal autonomy as both a city and a federal state. More recently (since 2022), Vienna introduced the Wiener Klimateam<sup>1</sup>, a participatory climate initiative in which residents across participating districts can submit and collaboratively develop ideas for climate mitigation and adaptation (*participatory climate budget*), and a representative citizen jury in each district helps decide which of these ideas receive funding and implementation. Despite increasing emphasis on economic competitiveness and technological fixes, Vienna has maintained its core social-ecological orientation and multi-level policy coordination (Mocca et al., 2020).

**Nature-based Solutions.** Vienna has a long-standing tradition in nature protection and the provision of public parks (see Brenner et al. 2022). The introduction of new zoning categories for nature protection in the 1990s effectively imposed a building ban, making rezoning for other purposes highly challenging. Also, planning for new development areas since the 1990s has emphasised the provision of green spaces in accordance with administrative guidelines. The recent decade has been marked by the increasing effects of heat waves, leading to a strategic shift in cities towards greening public spaces in densely built-up, historic housing stock, while maintaining the other two pillars of green space development (Brenner et al. 2022, Friesenecker et al. 2024a).

The implementation of climate adaptation strategies in Vienna builds on (1) strategic documents binding for the work of the public administrative units, (2) adapting legal regulations, and (3) adapting financial support. Based on a set of strategic documents, a shared, binding policy framework for public authorities has led to diverse concepts, guidelines, and policy instruments at the administrative unit level, accelerating NBS implementation. Notable documents include the *Vienna Street Greenery Concept* (2012<sup>2</sup>), *Surface Drainage Guidelines* (2018<sup>3</sup>), *Green Facades Guideline* (2019<sup>4</sup>), and the *COOLing Fibel* (2023<sup>5</sup>). These efforts have fostered a "common understanding" of key NBS measures across city administration. In sum, the core strategies include street trees with automated irrigation, de-sealing surfaces, water features (e.g., fountains, fog showers), green facades and roofs.

Second, legal regulations in the Vienna Building Code (Bauordnung) have been a second key tool for implementation. In 2024, amendments to the Building Code strengthened requirements for green infrastructure, including streamlined approval for green facades, increased street tree planting, and mandates to descale surfaces<sup>6</sup>. For instance, two-thirds of landscaped areas must remain unsealed and contain soil-bound greenery (Section 79 (6) BO2024). Façade greening is now permit-free for the first three stories (Section 62a(1)(14) BO2024), and tree planting regulations have been tightened, requiring one tree per 200 m<sup>2</sup> of landscaped land (previously 250 m<sup>2</sup>) (Section 79 (7) BO). New parking space regulations (as

<sup>1</sup> See <https://klimateam.wien.gv.at/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/umwelt/parks/pdf/strassengruen-leitbild-2012.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://wien.arching.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/redakteure\\_wnb/D\\_Service/D\\_1\\_1\\_Baurecht/Richtlinien/oberflaechenentwaesserung-leitfaden.pdf](https://wien.arching.at/fileadmin/user_upload/redakteure_wnb/D_Service/D_1_1_Baurecht/Richtlinien/oberflaechenentwaesserung-leitfaden.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/raum/fassadenbegruenung.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/kontakte/ma42/publikationen.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=LrW&Gesetzesnummer=20000006>

of 2023) further promote urban greening by reducing required parking spots in public transport-accessible areas, freeing space for 2–3 additional street trees per 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> residential building. However, these legislative changes are not immediately binding on property owners unless modifications or new developments are undertaken.

Third, financial support has been recently adapted as well. In Vienna, 23 district governments are responsible for managing, providing, and expanding green spaces, including street greening and tree planting. Since 2018, Vienna's 23 districts have received dedicated funding to preserve, adapt and expand green spaces<sup>7</sup>. A 2021 funding reform increased financial allocations to districts, linking funds to green space maintenance needs and prioritising climate-stressed areas, such as those requiring additional watering of trees. The budget for new green infrastructure was further expanded, but districts maintain control over fund allocation. Additionally, the "Lebenswerte Klimamusterstadt" (Liveable Climate Model City) programme, launched in 2021, provides €20 million annually for district greening projects, totalling €100 million by 2025. Projects receive 40–80% co-funding, depending on factors such as soil de-sealing, the proportion of greenery, and the use of sponge city principles. Surface sealing levels are particularly considered due to their direct impact on urban heat stress (Friesenecker et al. 2024b).

**Densification.** In Vienna, initially, the densification of already built-up central areas aimed to ease the pressures of population growth. These urban areas are primarily dominated by pre-war private rental housing, which is subject to rent regulation under the national tenancy law. Due to rapid population growth (around 450,000 since 1990) and rising private housing prices, the City Government has made affordable housing a primary goal in recent decades. Hence, to ensure the production of affordable housing, the key mechanism used is the continuous construction of new apartments across the city (Friesenecker and Litschauer, 2022). Although the city tries to (re-)use brownfield sites, rising land prices have forced it to build new affordable housing on greenfield sites as well (Friesenecker and Litschauer, 2022). For significant greenfield site developments, the administration regulates the construction of new green spaces through land zoning, developer competitions, and general urban planning guidelines, e.g., the size of parks, the features green spaces should have, etc. The Viennese administration has strategically supported the construction of limited-profit housing units since the 1990s through a policy mix of: a) developer competitions (Bauträgerwettbewerbe), b) housing subsidies and c) an active land policy in place since the mid-1980s. In brief, developer competitions are not contests for the lowest bidders, but rather competitions for high construction quality combined with low rents, thereby favouring LPHA (see Friesenecker and Litschauer, 2022, for more details).

Assessing the spatiality of new urban developments since 2005, most of these large residential areas have been developed on the outskirts of the city or on previously brownfield sites distributed across the city. Large brownfield projects in the city centre are usually located at former railyards around train stations, such as Nordbahngelände (2nd district), Nordwestbahngelände (20th district) or Sonnwendviertel (10th district), or at former industrial production facilities. These areas are usually characterised by a mixed approach to housing, including subsidised social housing by LPHA, as well as freely financed housing and ownership models.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/bezirke/dezentralisierung/budget/>

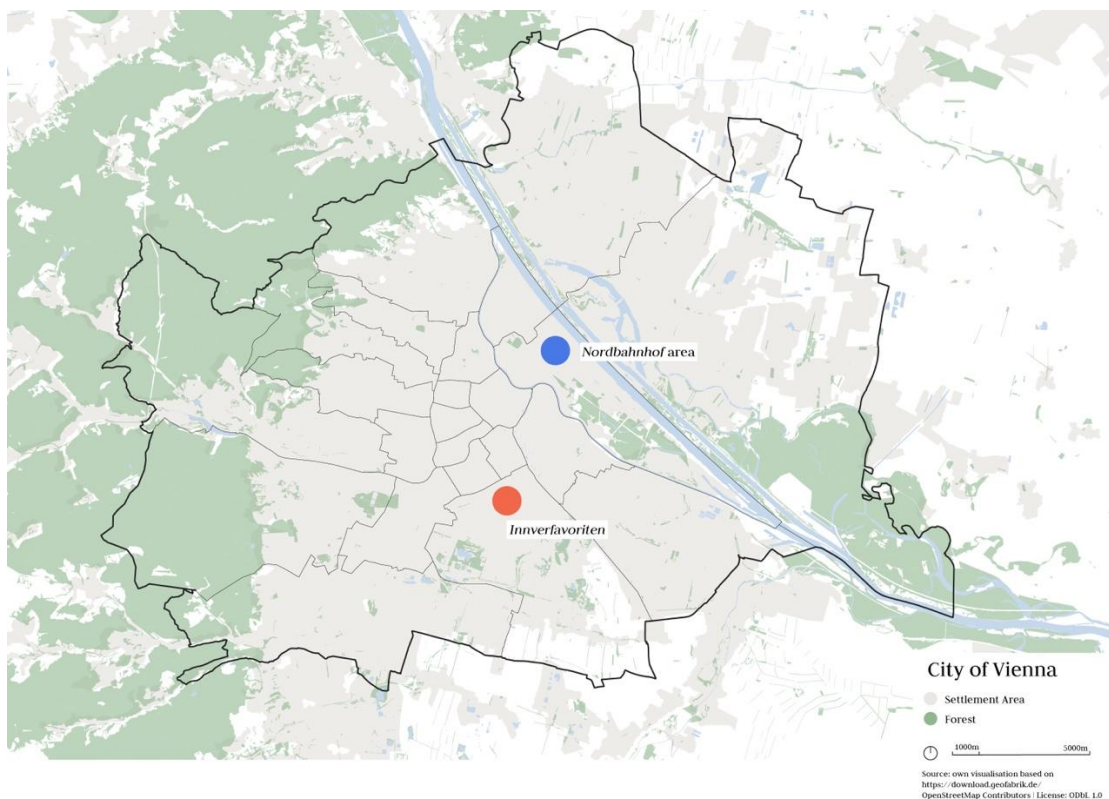
In sum, the Viennese housing policy focuses on building new residential buildings within existing urban areas. The main advantage of the Viennese housing policy is that it provides a strong instrument for integrating social and ecological aspects under the banner of liveability. While new residential developments focus on delivering a minimum amount of green space for new citizens, this comes at the cost of improving overall green space within the city, especially in areas where historically dense urban development leads to problems with urban heat waves and biodiversity loss.

**Energy Efficient Retrofit.** In Vienna, the use of housing subsidies for retrofitting is organised via the “Soft Urban Renewal” (Sanfte Stadterneuerung) programme. The origins of this programme date back to the 1970s, to subsidise the renovation of pre-WWII private buildings with rental units while minimising negative impacts on existing tenants (see Franz, 2015, p. 175ff; Kirsch-Soriano da Silva et al., 2025). If private landlords use public loans for renewal within this programme, they must comply with specific regulations, e.g. they are not allowed to convert rental flats into condominiums and must observe a rent freeze for the duration of the subsidies - usually for 15 years. Managed by the public agency *wohnfonds\_wien*, which distributes renewal subsidies in the form of loans and non-repayable grants, the programme includes several types of renewal and retrofitting. On the one hand, singular measures, e.g., dwelling improvements, liveability improvements (shading systems, greening, etc.), and subsidies for adding rooftop units. Most common, however, is the so-called base renewal (Sockelsanierung), where renewal of the building but also the dwellings is done either with tenants’ present upon their agreement, or their relocation, including financial compensation or the denial of tenants in having their apartments renewed (see Hatz, 2021, for more details). A so-called total renewal, on the other hand, is carried out in vacant buildings and can include demolition, new construction, or the addition of storeys. In the years before the global financial crisis of 2008, subsidies granted to private owners as an instrument showed decreased effectiveness and popularity. According to Franz and Gruber (2019, p. 390), reasons include the high administrative effort required for subsidised renewals, the increased inflow of international investment capital, and low interest rates.

According to Hatz (2021), political priorities also shifted towards environmental and climate protection efforts and subsidised energetic retrofits (Thermisch-energetische Wohnhaussanierung), which have since become more critical. The funding regulation stipulates that a complete energetic retrofit requires the improvement of at least 3 parts of the building hull and/or heating system: replacing windows and outer doors, insulation of roof or top floor ceiling, façades, basement ceiling, or improvements in relation to the heating and hot water provision (Wohnfonds\_Wien, 2024). Furthermore, they must comply with the minimum requirements for heating and energy standards set out in the housing renovation ordinance (Sanierungsverordnung), introduced in 2008. In contrast to deep renovations, including the replacement of heating systems, energetic retrofits such as thermal insulation were, to a large degree, applied to municipal housing estates because retrofitting the building hull can be carried out in occupied buildings as well (Hatz, 2021). A report by the Austrian Court of Audit, however, identified a lag in retrofitting activities in recent years. Assuming a 30-year renovation cycle is the most cost-efficient, around 7,000 units should be retrofitted each year. In contrast, between 2013 and 2023, only about 45% were undergoing retrofits or were planned for retrofits (Rechnungshof Österreich, 2021). However, according to that report, Wiener Wohnen introduced a retrofitting strategy in which it identified 9% of its stock as being in an insufficient energetic and building condition and designated it as the primary target for retrofitting.

## 1.2 Green Transition Interventions in Vienna: Innerfavoriten and Nordbahnhof

Over the last three decades, as one of the fastest-growing cities in Europe, Vienna's historic neighbourhoods have undergone highly dynamic transformations in density and urban renewal. At the same time, centrally located, large-scale brownfields were transformed into new urban city quarters. The two areas for the Vienna case study were selected based on these two transitions: On the one hand, the neighbourhood of Innerfavoriten stands for the transformation of centrally located historic areas undergoing urban renewal and retrofitting processes geared towards climate adaptation through NBS. On the other hand, Nordbahnhof is a central, newly built area on a former railway yard and industrial brownfield, where the city aims to create a new, highly dense and green urban residential quarter.



*Figure 1: Map of Vienna with the districts and location of case study areas. Source: Own elaboration on basis of openstreetmap*

**Innerfavoriten** is characterised by its current physical structure: a largely intact Gründerzeit street grid, dense perimeter-block development, and very high building and population density. The area predominantly functions as a residential neighbourhood (with building typology ranging from Gründerzeit-era buildings to a mix of post-war reconstruction-era buildings). However, remnants of former commercial and small-scale industrial uses persist, particularly at the ground-floor level. A significant share of the building stock exhibits a high need for refurbishment, reflecting both its age and long-term underinvestment. At the same time, vacancies and underused properties indicate substantial latent potential for transformation. The dense built form, limited green spaces with vegetation and a high degree of soil sealing contribute to pronounced summer heat stress, making Innerfavoriten particularly vulnerable to

overheating during heatwaves. In terms of mobility, the district shows low car ownership and good public transport access, complemented by widespread traffic-calming measures, though cycling infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Economically, Innerfavoriten is characterised by highly heterogeneous ground-floor zones, a dense mix of small businesses and local suppliers alongside residual productive activities, and overall low purchasing power, shaping everyday economic life in the neighbourhood.

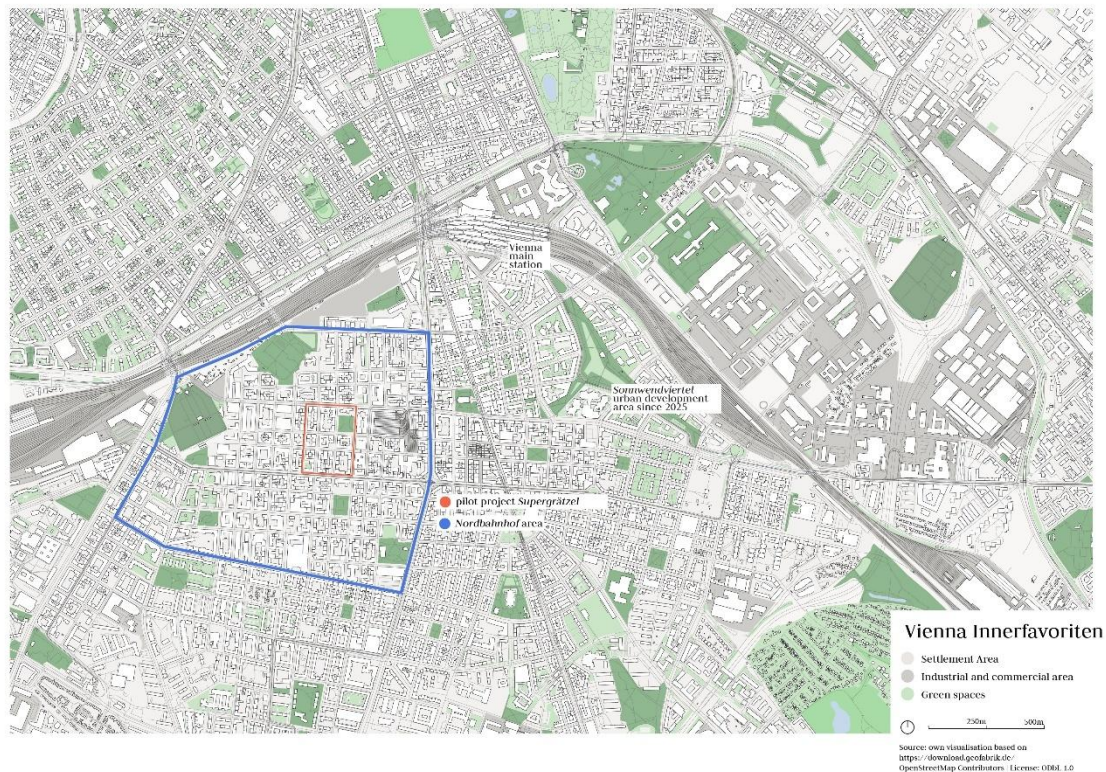


Figure 2: Area of Innerfavoriten. Source: Own elaboration on basis of openstreetmap

From a socio-demographic and functional perspective, Innerfavoriten displays a very high population density, relatively large household sizes and a high proportion of non-Austrian citizens (more than 40% of inhabitants are third-country nationals, e.g. from Serbia, Syria and Turkey, according to Stadt Wien – Integration und Diversität, 2023 & Land Wien – Statistik, 2024), while the average age of residents is slightly below the Vienna mean. Despite educational facilities for different age groups, the area is marked by a comparatively high unemployment rate and inadequate levels of care and health-related infrastructure, as evidenced by high unemployment among third-country nationals. In terms of participation and political representation, a high share of the voting-age population (16 years+) lacks voting rights in the area (Stadt Wien, MA 17 – Integration und Diversität, 2023, S. 65).

Due to the demand for renovation and the area's socio-demographic vulnerability, the area of Innerfavoriten outlined in Figure 2 was selected for the implementation of several programmes and projects, which are connected to Vienna's diverse strategy plans (STEP2025, Klimafahrplan, Stadterneuerung, etc.). First and foremost, Innerfavoriten was selected as the

programme WieNeu+'s first focus area. The aim of the WieNeu+ programme (with its predecessor, the EU-funded Smarter Together programme) is to systematically activate built, social, and spatial potentials at the district level. Its objectives include the socially equitable, resource-efficient, and climate-neutral upgrading of the existing building stock, combined with climate change adaptation measures such as heat-reducing building design and improvements to semi-public and public open spaces. WieNeu+ further seeks to strengthen social cohesion and local participation by involving residents in neighbourhood development processes, while enhancing the local economy, promoting environmentally friendly mobility and improving the quality and accessibility of green and public spaces to increase overall liveability in dense urban areas. The latter was implemented in the area with the Viennese Superblock concept. Even before the start of WieNeu+, wohnfonds\_wien worked in the area to initiate and subsidise retrofitting and thermal refurbishment of private building owners, and later on collaborated closely with WieNeu+ on its goal of climate-neutral upgrading of the existing building stock (see Figure 3 for a timeline).

In addition to the programme, the city developed the Innerfavoriten Supergrätzl (an adaptation of the Barcelona Superblock concept). It commissioned a design team through a competitive process to translate the pilot learnings from a Superblock test phase (temporary filters, tactical markings, neighbourhood participation) into a permanent scheme. The Innerfavoriten Supergrätzl established a pedestrian-priority core along Herz-, Bernersdorfer-, Alxinger- and Erlachgasse, with traffic-calming filters, expanded ground-level NBS (greening and trees targeting roughly half of the surfaces in quieter streets), and modular urban furniture for seating, play, shading and cooling.

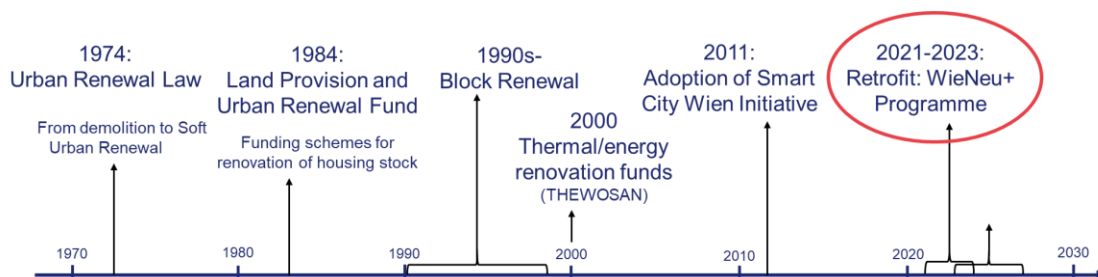


Figure 3: Timeline of the urban renewal process in Vienna. Source: Own elaboration

The **Nordbahnhofviertel**, on the other hand, is an example of brownfield development at the former Nordbahnhof railway station, which served as a train and freight station until 2000. It is centrally located between the Danube River and the city centre and is scheduled for completion by 2030, when approximately 20,000 people will live and work in the area. The first urban development guideline was published in 1994, and development began in 1999, including office buildings, social infrastructure (e.g., schools), and residential buildings (a mix of social housing, private rental, and condominiums). The first central park in the development, Rudolf Bednar Park, opened in 2008.

The case study, however, focuses on the second phase of development (see Figure 4). In 2011, the revision of the urban development guidelines began, and an urban development ideas competition was organised. Based on the winning project, new guidelines were developed, including a participatory process, and published in 2014 (see an overview of the

whole development timeline in Figure 5). Instead of a perimeter-block development, the concept included a central, ample green space of about 10ha (called *Die freie Mitte/The free centre*) with higher buildings at the edges.

To allow for the development of the “freie Mitte”, the residential areas at the edges feature more compact development with differentiated densities, including 8 high-rises ranging from 60 to 95 meters. Approximately 4,500 housing units are planned, including a mix of subsidised social housing, more expensive free-market private rental units, and apartment ownership. The question is whether this also led to greater building density than the previous plan, but it can be assumed, since building heights already exceed urban development guidelines. We also hypothesise that, besides some subsidised social housing and some subsidies and regulations for “affordable” housing units, new developments in the form of high rises will cater to the middle- and upper classes.

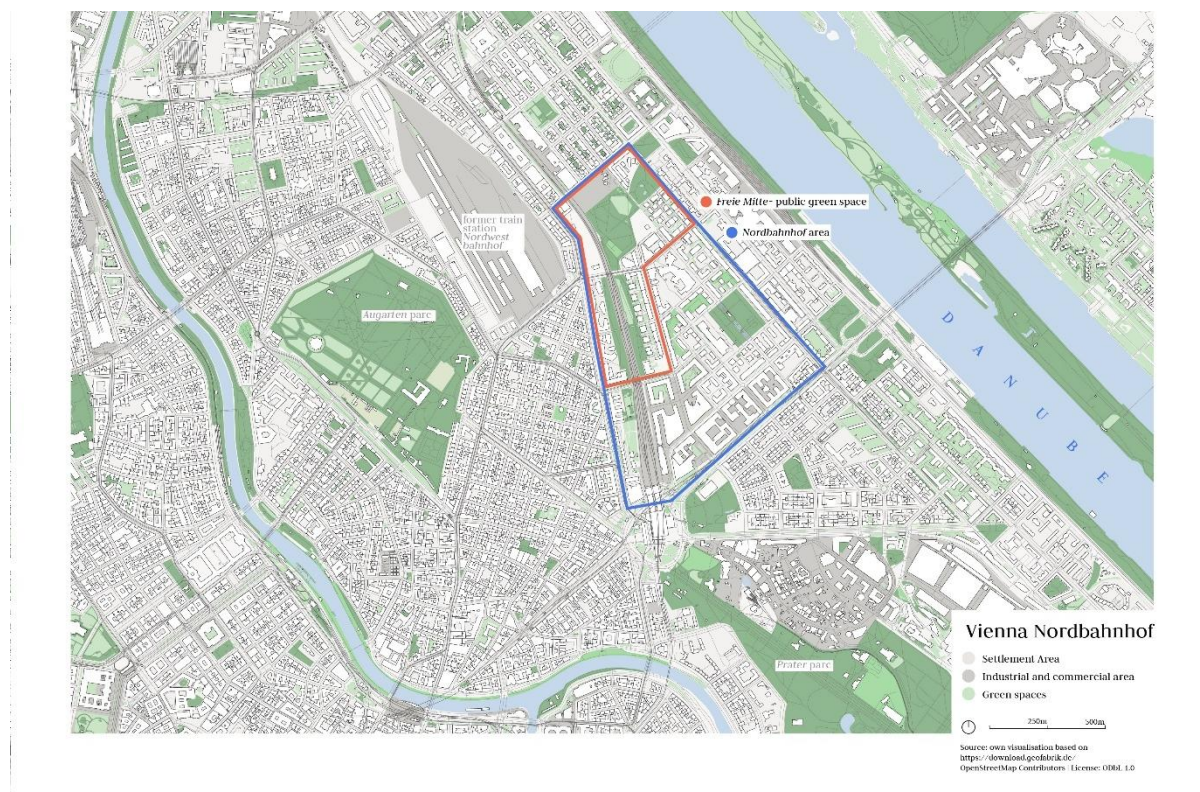


Figure 4: Area of Nordbahnhof. Source: Own elaboration on basis of openstreetmap

In 2015, the City of Vienna established a strategic unit (programme management) to coordinate and govern the development of the area. The programme management’s work also includes detailed concepts for various topics (such as fire safety requirements and rainwater management) that respond to changing urban planning, transport, and infrastructure framework conditions and ensure a gradual, efficient implementation of the overall project. In 2016, the municipal council approved a framework agreement between the City of Vienna and ÖBB with various contractual stipulations, including payments for infrastructure costs, the transfer of parts of the property, and the maintenance of urban development qualities, including basic shares of affordable housing provision.

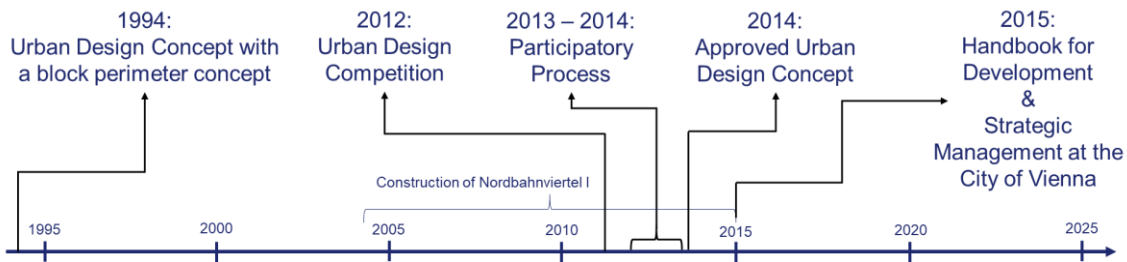


Figure 5: Timeline of Strategic Planning “Nordbahnhof - freie Mitte” in Vienna. Source: Own elaboration

In 2017, after the framework agreement with the consortium was formulated, the urban design concept was updated to continue the urban development model with fewer high-rise buildings while increasing the height of existing ones. The reduction from eight to five high-rises was justified by the high share of subsidised/affordable housing, which would not have been possible in high-rises. Based on those developments, the City released a general zoning plan and a partial development plan in 2017/2018. The narratives of housing developers and public city officials highlight the importance of having a single organisational body overseeing such a significant redevelopment to steer development which is aligned with the Manual of the Urban Design Concept.

In subsequent development, the consortium became the decisive organisational tool that enabled the coordination of repeated architectural competitions, the release of building plans aligned with competition outcomes, and recurring quality-assurance reviews across eight building plots from 2018 onwards. Architectural competitions for each of the eight building plots were held starting in 2018, followed by the release of the resulting building plans. Based on the 2012 competition ideas for the ‘Freie Mitte’ together with citizen participation results, the planning offices of *VlayStreeruwitz*, *Agence Ter*, and *Land in Sicht* further refined the design of the central ruderal, open space in the form of a master plan. After this master plan, the area for the freie Mitte was zoned, and in 2019, the City of Vienna commissioned *AgenceTer* (in cooperation with *Land in Sicht*) to plan the area<sup>8</sup>.

The 9.3-hectare park was constructed and opened in several phases: the “wild” area in the northern part was opened in 2021, and the central area and strips that unfold into the built infrastructure were opened in 2022 and 2024<sup>9</sup>. Regarding the building plots, by the beginning of 2026, 6 of the 8 were completed. The first housing projects were realised in 2022, with others following subsequently.

Table 1. Key data on two case study areas in Vienna

	Innerfavoriten	Nordbahnhof
Neighbourhood characteristics (general social type,	Historic neighbourhood with high building density with low share of green spaces; area: 1.12 km <sup>2</sup> ;	Extensive brownfield redevelopment north of the historic centre and close to the Danube; “dense edges—open

<sup>8</sup>

[https://www.gbsterne.at/fileadmin/gb/mitte/Archiv\\_18\\_23/2\\_STM\\_Nordbahnviertel/Freiraeume\\_Nordbahnviertel/Freie\\_Mitte/Praesentation\\_Freie\\_Mitte.pdf](https://www.gbsterne.at/fileadmin/gb/mitte/Archiv_18_23/2_STM_Nordbahnviertel/Freiraeume_Nordbahnviertel/Freie_Mitte/Praesentation_Freie_Mitte.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.wien.gv.at/freizeit/parkanlage-nordbahnhof>

economic activities, density, etc.)	population of area: approx. 34.500 inhabitants with a high percentage of migrant population; well connected to public transport and in proximity to the Vienna Main Train Station	centre middle” model with a 9.3 ha ruderal Open Centre (Freie Mitte) and perimeter consolidation including five high-rises; mixed tenure (subsidised, price-capped, market), new ground-floor uses and local services; strong multimodal access and new path/corridor network; by early 2026, 6 of 8 building plots completed
Duration	Urban renewal focus with programs: WieNeu+ (Strategy/ Implementation 2021–2023 / predecessor project “Smarter Together“ (2016-2021), Blocksanierungsgebiete (2017/18 – Strategy; since 2019/20 implementation), Superblock (2021 Concept, 2022 Pilot, 2025 Completion)	Long-arc transformation: 1994 Urban Design Concept (Leitbild); 2011 EU-wide ideas competition; 2013–2014 extensive participation; 2014 concept approval; 2015 handbook (“Freie Mitte – Vielseitiger Rand”); 2016 City–ÖBB framework agreement and programme management; 2017 concept update (fewer towers, taller perimeter); 2018–ongoing plot competitions and QA reviews; 2019 Freie Mitte design commission; park openings 2021/2022/2024; delivery ongoing to 2026
Institutional funding	City of Vienna, partial EU-funding H2020 (Smarter Together)	City of Vienna and ÖBB framework agreement (cost-sharing, land transfers); Vienna’s housing support (Wohnbauförderung/LPHA subsidies) for subsidised segments; Public funds for green spaces
Actor constellation (in addition to “Institutional funding”)	City of Vienna with diverse administrative departments (MA 25, MA 19, etc.), Gebietsbetreuung, wohnfonds_wien, Wiener Wohnen, limited-profit housing associations (ÖSW, bwsg), private developers, engineering, planning and architecture firms ( <i>EGKK Landschaftsarchitektur</i> , studio laut, Schöberl & Pöhl) and residents involved in the participation process	City of Vienna (MA 21 planning, MA 19 architecture, MA 42 City Gardens), ÖBB (landowner), programme management unit; design/planning: StudioVlayStreeruwitz, Agence Ter, Land in Sicht; consortium developers (VIG, ÖVW, STRABAG Real Estate, KIBB Immobilien), limited-profit housing associations; wohnfonds_wien; Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung; IG Lebenswerter Nordbahnhof; Quality Assurance Board with administration, experts, consortium and resident delegates
Aims and objectives	Activation of the area to initiate climate-neutral building refurbishment, climate change adaptation, and heat reduction through the enhancement of public and green spaces, the participatory inclusion of inhabitants, and sustainable mobility measures.	Preserve and operationalise a large ruderal Open Centre with dual park/nature protection; consolidate density at edges; deliver mixed tenures with majority regulated; ensure permeability and high-quality ground floors; coordinate greening, mobility corridors and social amenities; embed

		long-term governance and quality assurance.
Specific physical measures	Small-scale initiatives through participatory budget, partial initiation of refurbishments and facade greening, Creation of a superblock with public space greening and road reconfiguration.	Freie Mitte (9.3 ha) with species protection, new zoning category for dual use, ecological oversight/monitoring; perimeter blocks and five towers; aligned tree/shrub bands, rain gardens, green margins; façade greening and deep-root planting; activated ground floors and play areas; path network, co-working/shared rooms; rail-adjacent mitigation effort
Accompanying housing policy/regulatory measures	Subsidies for refurbishment and decarbonisation feasibility studies in limited-profit housing and private developments; no new regulatory measures, but more intense collaboration between housing actors and administrative agencies across silos	City-ÖBB framework agreement fixing tenure shares (≈ two-thirds subsidised/price-capped, one-third market) and quality targets; “preiswert” 20-year indexed cap (with allowed tower surcharge); Smart housing allocation with NGO partnerships; iterative competitions and QA Board reviews as soft-law oversight; open-edge/permeability conditions; reduction/repositioning of towers due to subsidy feasibility
Key social tensions or/and benefits between greening and housing	Benefits: cooler, safer, more usable streets through Supergrätzl; energy savings from retrofits; activation of social infrastructure; maintenance-first approach supporting long-run affordability; pilot formats with public support scaling citywide. Tensions: upgrade-led valorisation and gradual rent pressure; cost pass-throughs from greening and retrofits; disruption and consent hurdles in works; fragmented ownership and regulatory limits slowing decarbonisation; speculative conversions; short-term rentals reducing affordable supply; uneven capacity for low-threshold participation.	Benefits: broad acceptance of the wild Open Centre; microclimate cooling and everyday liveability; regulated segments temper classic green-gentrification dynamics. Tensions: post-occupation participatory gaps; affordability pressures from macro cost/interest rate shocks; investor-type underuse in some ownership towers and higher operating costs for specific greening systems.

## 2 Methods

Qualitative data for this case study were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2025 and February 2026. A total of 21 interviews with 22 participants were performed, including public administration officials, public bodies, private developers, and civic initiatives.

Interviewees included representatives of public institutions (such as the City of Vienna and its city-owned agencies), representatives of private, public and limited-profit housing providers, civic organisations (such as tenant organisations, urban renewal neighbourhood offices), planners, and real-estate consultants, each with specific expertise in housing, nature-based solutions, building retrofit, and urban densification, and residents of buildings in the two selected areas.

Sampling of policymakers and technical staff drew on contacts established during the preparation and participation in the ReHousIn Policy Lab held in April 2025, as well as through researchers' previous research engagements, visits to public events, and direct contact via institutional email addresses associated with the respective organisations. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

The interviews were conducted in person (except one) and recorded with participants' consent using a recording device. The interviews were initially transcribed using the software A-train (Haberl et al. 2023). In a second step, all transcripts were carefully reviewed while listening to the audio recordings, and corrections were made where necessary. For coding and organising the qualitative data, MAXQDA was used. For reporting citations, parts of the interviews were translated into English.

Of the 22 interviews, four were conducted by more than one researcher from the project team, while 18 interviews were conducted by a single researcher. All interviews were conducted either at the interviewees' workplaces, homes or at the university. As preparation for the interviews, individual background research was conducted for each interviewee, based on their topic and position, including the review of legal documents, reports and studies, planning documents, academic literature, and materials from neighbourhood organisations, local district newspapers, and media outlets. These materials were used to identify interviewees, contextualise findings and triangulate claims.

In addition to the interviews, the study applied complementary qualitative methods tailored to the Viennese context. These included research walks through the two neighbourhoods to document locations referenced by interview partners, such as public green spaces, nature-based solutions (NBS), residential buildings by LPHA and retrofitting projects. During these walks, photographic documentation was produced to support the contextual interpretation of the interview findings.

Nonetheless, the research is subject to some limitations. Capturing civic perspectives proved challenging, as Vienna is characterised by a relatively small number of organised civic groups in housing. As a result, only a limited number of residents' perspectives could be captured, which does not constitute a representative sample of the affected population. While interviews with civic institutions (such as tenant organisations and urban renewal neighbourhood offices) provided essential insights into resident-related concerns, these perspectives cannot fully

substitute for a broader range of individual resident voices, particularly those of more marginalised groups with limited capacity for formal representation. In addition, as many of the redevelopment and adaptation measures examined are still ongoing, the findings reflect anticipatory assessments and evolving dynamics rather than finalised outcomes.

### 3 Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Innerfavoriten

#### 3.1 Precedents and implementation

Innerfavoriten was selected as one of Vienna’s WieNeu+ renewal areas (“Grätzl”) based on a combination of social and physical needs and strategic development dynamics. The programme emerged from Vienna’s long-standing tradition of urban renewal since the 1970s, with institutions such as the *Land Provision and Urban Renewal Fund* (today: *wohnfonds\_wien*) being created and programmes such as *Block Renewal* being implemented. These precedents were recast after 2020 as a pilot-driven framework for the city through the programme WieNeu+, which connects technical priorities (decarbonization, climate adaptation, circularity) with social goals such as quality of life, inclusion and affordability. At the early start of WieNeu+, the area of Innerfavoriten was designated as an early testbed for method development in the city’s existing building stock under real-world constraints. According to public city official in our interviews, selection combined acute needs and strategic anchors: significant renovation backlogs, vulnerable populations, weak public-space quality, and key sites likely to influence local trajectories (e.g., the tram garage *Remise*, the new brownfield development *Neues Landgut*, and the new subway line U5), alongside synergies with existing block-renewal areas and partners such as *wohnfonds\_wien*.

Programme setup and early implementation coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic (2021–2022), complicating place-based engagement and slowing the start-up of field activities. City officials stress that renewal in built-up neighbourhoods proceeds through owner-led, long-cycle decisions; only a small share of buildings can realistically enter works each year, producing renovation rates of 1–3% and limiting the likelihood that any single programme will trigger a “wave” (public city official). This recognition shaped a pragmatic instrument mix: block-renewal studies and owner outreach; micro-grants for neighbourhood activation (e.g., “Grätzl-Marie”); demonstrator projects in energy and circular construction; and public-space transformation through the *Supergrätzl*.

“I wouldn’t say that WieNeu+ triggered a renovation wave there; that was beyond what was possible—and, to be honest, we can’t do that. What we could do was make a difference in individual cases, providing support and funding to help specific properties and projects.” (City official)

A visible public-space strand built on a prior pilot inspired by Barcelona’s superblocks, the Viennese *Supergrätzl*. The Innerfavoriten *Supergrätzl* established a pedestrian-priority core, and the nearby school gained a quieter entrance area; overall quality improved according to the responsible landscape planner and a city official. Civic actors emphasise that *Supergrätzl* was decided for this area after contention elsewhere and was not formally part of WieNeu+, though it aligned closely and cooperated operationally. According to the civic organisation, a test phase drew initial scepticism from residents. Still, it proved valuable for cross-sectoral

collaboration, resolving interdepartmental logistics within the city administration (e.g., waste, fire access), and consolidating local support. Civic organisations on site, such as the GB\* and the Kinderfreunde, provided more in-depth knowledge of local residents' needs and preferences for the project, according to a city official.

“There were reactions like, ‘Okay, and they’ve closed the street for this?’ because people in Vienna aren’t really familiar with these temporary measures, so there was some scepticism about what it was all for. In retrospect, I believe this test phase was very important—less for the public, I think, and more for clarifying and trying out unresolved internal questions within the city administration.” (Civic organisation representative)

Energy and retrofit work proceeded through both public and private portfolios. Social housing providers used WieNeu+ to refine low-cost, high-impact optimisation, learning that tuning heating systems must accompany thermal improvements to capture efficiency gains (an insight that catalysed further applied research with academic and funding partners). The same actors of LPHA describe WieNeu+ grants as helpful but modest relative to needs; they therefore rely on portfolio-level planning tools (condition scoring every three years, size/budget balancing, synergy with district heating roll-outs) to prioritise interventions and aim to reduce the overall renovation cycle over time. Network effects were significant: regular multi-actor meetings facilitated knowledge transfer across research, utilities, NGOs, and owners, enabling formats such as “Cooling Zones” to mature and scale citywide from Innerfavoriten’s experiments.

“Affordable housing can, in effect, be achieved by lowering heating costs, but of course, the investments made by a non-profit do not pay back very quickly—or sometimes not at all. That is certainly the biggest obstacle.” (Social housing provider)

Private developers engaged selectively with the programme’s logics. According to a real-estate consultant, some private real-estate projects have already anticipated the city of Vienna’s strategic goals by proactively integrating façade and roof greening, exploring geothermal solutions, and offering to co-develop adjacent public space—positioning themselves as pilots rather than waiting for incentives. Early neighbour agreements and close coordination with the planning department and the district were viewed as pragmatic risk management, and WieNeu+ subsequently drew on these examples as inspiration. At the same time, developer interviewees flagged a structural tension between financing deep retrofits and Vienna’s strong rent regulation: loosening constraints to recoup investments could undermine affordability, while maintaining strict caps challenges the business case for rapid decarbonization at scale.

Civic perspectives underscore the selection rationale (high renovation needs, vulnerable groups, and adjacency to areas of rising land value, such as Sonnwendviertel and Hauptbahnhof) and the benefits of the Supergrätzl for everyday life. They also note the contribution of earlier groundwork, such as the GB\* “Smarter Inner-Favoriten” area analysis, which informed WieNeu+ planning even as high-level political selection processes remained less visible externally.

Taken together, the history and implementation of projects such as WieNeu+ and Supergrätzl in Innerfavoriten illustrate a calibrated approach: politically anchored but pilot-oriented; cautious about impact attribution yet focused on building a replicable toolkit; and attentive to

the interaction between social and technical aims. In general, city officials describe the programme WieNeu+ as a vital learning ground, on the one hand for testing how strategies can be translated into practice and, on the other hand, for the urban renewal of subsequent areas and the roll-out of decarbonization measures and subsidies. Outcomes to date include method development for managing the existing building stock, citywide diffusion of measures against heat stress and cooling formats, demonstrators in circular renovation and heating optimisation, and a reconfigured public realm and mobility patterns that enhance the quality of local public spaces. The WieNeu+ programme’s and Supergrätzl’s next steps (expansion to additional districts) depend on budget, sustaining cross-actor networks and aligning portfolio logics with city utilities. When discussing these outlooks, both city officials and social housing providers stress that navigating the affordability–decarbonization trade-off that shapes renovation trajectories in neighbourhoods is a key challenge.

“In essence—speaking in my own words—we also call WieNeu+ ‘future- and climate-ready at the neighbourhood scale.’ For me, and I think I’ve said this elsewhere, it’s about connecting the social and the technical. The technical side is climate, climate change, adaptation, circular economy; the social side is quality of life, social inclusion, innovation, and so on. That linkage between the social and the technical has been a core theme of urban renewal in the past. It will certainly be one for the future—bringing social and technical progress together in the existing city.” (City official)

### 3.2 Governance and participation

Vienna’s hierarchical governance model mirrors the implementation of urban renewal programmes and projects in Inner Favoriten. In general, programmes such as WieNeu+ and the Supergrätzl are based on a politically mandated, pilot-driven framework for the city, aligned with strategies such as the *Smart Climate City Strategy Vienna* (2022). Unlike a statutory programme, WieNeu+ rests on City Council decisions and coalition agreements and is being continued into new areas. To counter silo thinking and facilitate cross-departmental collaboration in line with the *Smart Climate City Strategy*, additional units have been created to connect social goals with climate goals across all policies and programmes.

“This means that we [in our unit] do not set up new projects or our own projects, but we work for others on the topics of social aspects of housing. This means that it is now very much about the transformation of the city, decarbonization, but also the circular economy. (...) And we are the ones who then say, yes, but we have not considered the social aspects of housing, we have not considered affordability, we have to look at the accessibility, what does that mean for the people?” (City official)

In Innerfavoriten governance combined the city-led, top-down coordination (along the *Smart Climate City Strategy Vienna*) of the local district in addition to manifold city administrative departments (MA18, MA19, MA25, etc.), public agencies (wohnfonds\_wien, Wiener Wohnen, etc.) with delegated, place-based instruments and external partnerships (GB\*, social housing providers, planners). Participation remains closely framed by existing governance structures, as WieNeu+ relies on the GB\* as intermediaries that channel residents’ inputs into district governance, thereby coordinating between citizens, municipal departments and other actors while leaving strategic priorities and decision-making authority primarily with the city

administration. City officials describe stepping beyond their core remit in the WieNeu+ programme to convene planning and participation around key spaces (e.g., Quellenplatz/Laxenburger Straße) through surveys, a citizen day, and collaboration with the GB\*, while acknowledging the limits to what their department could implement directly. The city also tested a participatory budget instrument, *Grätzlmarie*, which enables residents and initiatives to propose and implement small-scale projects within predefined, city-set programme objectives related to climate action and social cohesion. The *Grätzlmarie* approach was later exported to other WieNeu+ areas.

“They continued to rely on cooperation with the Gebietsbetreuungen (...) so that the population is more involved in this transformation process.” (Civic organisation representative)

Participation around the Supergrätzl was organised by the city administrative department MA18, together with an external team (Studio LAUT), during the pilot phase, with the Gebietsbetreuung (GB\*) acting as a cooperation partner rather than the lead. Civic actors, as well as a city official, emphasise that this design, especially in the pilot/test phase, helped the administration resolve cross-departmental logistics and support neighbourhood acceptance. In relation to the mentioned participatory budget instrument, one civic organisation noted that it is essential to keep participation low-threshold due to the local context, with limited resident capacity to apply for such programmes. This is also why institutions were explicitly allowed to submit projects (e.g., urban gardening furniture for the youth centre). This participatory governance choice was considered essential for equity from the civic side. In other settings, a planner reports recalibrating ambitions during participation when late-night noise or other concerns surfaced, showing that iterative, negotiated outcomes are part of the “governance DNA”.

Administrative coordination across governance levels and ambitions to include citizens in participatory formats brought friction: EFRE/structural-fund accounting was seen as difficult, and city teams faced internal compliance constraints, such as data-protection limits on proactive owner outreach that were later resolved via a new legal basis in the Vienna Climate Act to contact owners for climate-relevant activities. Officials also note that calls and design procurements for public-space projects have recently dropped due to budget pressures, even as climate goals remain on paper. According to one city official, this will lead to more low-cost tactical urbanism projects being implemented for more extended periods before final design.

"EU money from the Structural Funds – the settlement of the Structural Funds, EFRE – to be honest, it's so tedious and complicated." (City official)

Policy and legal frameworks served both as enablers and constraints. City officials highlight the interplay of EU directives and national renovation roadmaps with local instruments (e.g., positioning WieNeu+ as a measure), and stress how regulatory tweaks are translated into practice (e.g., mandatory adherence to gardening land-use, stricter greening standards in the building code, and the need for combined federal and state subsidies to make “Raus aus Gas” upgrades viable). They also underline that most measures remain voluntary and highly dependent on incentives; when subsidies dip, advisory services (such as *wohnfonds\_wien*) see an immediate slowdown in building owner decisions. On housing regulation, officials describe a fragmented landscape of rent-law applications across units within the same building, the effects of capped indices and temporary rent caps on investment appetite, and an ongoing debate about fixed-term leases and tenure security.

Perspectives of housing providers diverge by tenure and development logic. Private developers point to the complexity of securing consents in both condominium and rental buildings, and to the need for long, predictable policy horizons to inform decisions that take years from awareness to vote, design, and cost-secure approval. They also criticise limited densification potential for constraining viable deep renovations and retrofitting, arguing that tightening requirements for existing-building upgrades without parallel revenue reforms dampens delivery.

"The decision-making process for such a decarbonisation project takes years, and if the framework conditions change, that's (...) quite difficult for communication. There would have to be a long-term foreseeable development." (Private developer)

Social housing providers describe intensive tenant-engagement toolkits (e.g., door-to-door outreach, "house fairs," on-site advisory offices, themed discussion tables, and dedicated project websites) to secure informed consent for disruptive works, with cost certainty and no net rent increases as decisive for residents to agree to improvement measures. With rents frozen or capped and statutory increase routes constrained, they time projects to funding windows (e.g., previously with 60% federal support) and pause when refinancing is impossible; they also face heritage and building code rules as major cost drivers and note there is still no legal handle to compel decarbonization at scale.

"There were information letters, door-to-door visits, in-house exhibitions, consulting offices ... The main concerns of the tenants were financial: 'If you can guarantee that it won't cost more than it does now, then I'll join.'" (Social housing provider)

Across groups, there is alignment on the centrality of funding and policy stability for implementation, on the value of delegated and low-threshold participation (e.g., Grätzlmarie; institutional eligibility) to reach diverse groups of residents, and on the need for cross-departmental coordination to translate pilot ideas into operating procedures. Participation is seen as key by social housing providers to address gaps in the tenancy-law framework (such as obstacles to actual renovation work in apartments, a tenant's right of appeal hindering comprehensive retrofitting of whole buildings, etc.) and to implement decarbonization and retrofitting measures. Disparities centre on regulatory stringency and feasibility: developers contest rigorous building codes and densification limits; social providers stress rent-law and income constraints; city officials emphasise voluntary uptake and the need for incentives. Civic actors add that future regulation must reconcile decarbonization mandates with tenant rights and a more transparent, more unified tenancy law framework to ensure fairness and enable consent-based implementation. Private developers stress that, apart from the tenancy law, the rigorous building codes and complex regulation system in the Gründerzeit housing stock make it difficult for developers to carry out renovations and retrofit buildings in a financially sustainable and profitable way. The following quote refers to this aspect, especially to heritage and building culture requirements such as the attempts to conserve the historic appearance of the Gründerzeit through restricting too many modifications through attic conversions and roof top extensions.

"And as long as we remain so restrictive ... Cityscape ... 45 degrees ... we don't want more than an attic ... There are more and more requirements for the renovation of existing buildings ... and on the other hand, there is no earnings situation that stands in contrast to this." (Private housing developer)

### 3.3 (In)Equity (distributional)

Inequity in Innerfavoriten in relation to the WieNeu+ programme and Supergrätzl is closely linked to the district's socio-demographic profile, characterised by comparatively high shares of low-income households and residents with a migration background, which shapes differentiated exposure to housing insecurity and uneven capacities to benefit from urban upgrading. Against this backdrop, civic institutions and experts are particularly alert to potential tendencies toward displacement or gentrification, as tenure-based inequalities are particularly pronounced in such areas. Tenure structures condition distributive outcomes, as tenants in municipal and limited-profit housing benefit almost exclusively from open-ended tenancies and strong rent regulation, which enhances residential security but may also constrain renovation and decarbonisation measures.

Interviews with local stakeholders provide only tentative assessments of the distributive effects of WieNeu+ and the Supergrätzl intervention, noting that impacts on urban upgrading and displacement remain difficult to capture empirically and largely indeterminate, not least because the Supergrätzl was completed only in late 2025. One planner vaguely addresses the question of whether the Supergrätzl will have negative impacts on particular inhabitants by summarising that there are critical statements in the planning community about possible displacements, without further empirical evidence due to the short time frame for completion.

"So what that [the improvement of public space] means, we can't say yet. What we noticed: some property developers have already taken on the Supergrätzl, which has significantly improved the quality of life there. And so, there are already critical statements about the fact that this [displacement] may happen." (Planner)

A city official, on the other hand, doubts these suspected tendencies:

"So I was there, I saw it was well received, everyone was sitting on the benches, but I don't think it will be such a big displacement." (City official)

More broadly, justice and equity concerns are closely intertwined with technical efficiency gaps and institutional responsibilities, as misaligned incentives between landlords, tenants and energy providers contribute to hidden energy inefficiencies. At the same time, civic actors emphasise the need for earlier, more transparent communication on tenant rights and the longer-term rent trajectories associated with subsidised renovation measures.

City officials stress that distributional justice is not only about renovated façades and thermal shells but also about "hidden" energy losses within buildings (poorly tuned heating systems, thermostatic valves, and high flow temperatures), where significant energy is wasted because responsibilities and incentives are misaligned across landlords, tenants, and utilities. They frame this as a "landlord–tenant–energy-provider" dilemma that leaves savings unrealised and costs unevenly borne by owners (in the case of retrofitting costs) and tenants (in the case of energy costs in unrenovated buildings). Additionally, various city officials stress that refraining from installing green infrastructure, public space improvements, and nature-based solutions solely to avoid gentrification would be the wrong approach. Instead, they call for a roll-out of such measures and projects across the city (e.g., not creating isolated areas with NBS or superblocks), combined with stronger tenancy protection and the reversal of fixed-term tenancies (which fall within national jurisdiction).

“I say that all the people in this city deserve to have a great, open, high-quality public space. Regardless of how poor or how rich they are, or what financial opportunities they have. And I won't let myself be talked into gentrification just because parks are being made, because streets are being redesigned.” (City official)

For civic actors, equity hinges on informed consent and enforceable rights. They argue that proactive, low-threshold rights education is essential, since existing advice services depend on residents initiating contact. During forthcoming renovations, they call for stronger, earlier communication about tenants' legal protections and obligations, and for clearer links between subsidies and rent trajectories – especially where subsidised rents are fixed for the duration of support but may rise afterwards unless contractual clauses hold. By contrast, older residents with open-ended tenancy contracts are substantially better protected from displacement and rent increases, producing a form of generational inequity. Civic voices also underline that the disparities in the tenancy-law landscape (split regimes and short fixed terms) exacerbate displacement risks and bargaining asymmetries, and that any decarbonization mandate must be matched with protections, relocation logistics, and a more unified legal framework.

“A very important aspect ... would be to explain the existing rights more assertively ... and to communicate earlier and more clearly in the case of upcoming renovations what the rights are in the first place.” (Civic organisation representative)

Private developers highlight distributive issues in condominium ownership (WEG): equity and feasibility hinge on whether all co-owners can bear the costs. Financing constraints escalate for older or economically vulnerable owners who cannot secure loans, making unanimity difficult and potentially blocking collective upgrades. They question the fairness of proceeding when one owner would be overburdened, noting that courts often side against measures that impose unsustainable debt, thereby stalling urgently needed works. This raises a justice challenge, depending on who pays, and how rules can avoid penalising the least able while still enabling renovation.

“And of course, I have to try to achieve unanimity [in condominiums]. And if I completely overwhelm a person, it doesn't matter whether he is older or whether he is disadvantaged in some other way; he cannot afford it: do we as a society then have the right to take away his apartment or to guarantee huge debts that he cannot afford? In court, this will usually probably have a negative outcome. But then you can't go on. That's a bit of a problem. Who bears the costs?” (Private Housing developer)

Social housing providers foreground affordability safeguards in implementation. They report that even small operating-cost increases can face resistance or legal challenge, as tenants worry about cumulative burdens (e.g., maintenance and inspections for shared amenities being passed to service charges). Providers, therefore, proceed cautiously and justify any cost impacts. Where disruptive works or affordability concerns arise, offer replacement apartments and negotiate through the “Schlichtungsstelle”, a conciliation board for applications by housing providers seeking to increase maintenance costs. They underscore that equity means minimising net rent increases, aligning the timing with subsidies, and ensuring tenants are supported throughout the renovation process.

“We have to be very careful with an increase. (...) The maintenance is reflected in the operating costs. In the case of measures that increase operating costs (for example, a drinking fountain in the courtyard) some tenant will probably protest against it, even if the costs increase only slightly.” (Social Housing provider)

Across groups, alignments include the need for stronger information and participation to uphold rights and secure consent; the centrality of subsidies and predictable rules to protect affordability; and mechanisms that avoid pushing costs onto those least able to pay. Disparities emerge over who should bear upgrade costs and how far collective decisions can override individual constraints: developers emphasise the fairness of not proceeding when owners cannot afford the work; civic actors emphasise tenant protections and post-subsidy rent clarity; officials stress systemic inefficiencies and the misalignment of incentives across actors. All agree that justice in decarbonization requires coupling technical upgrades with legal safeguards, funding, and tailored support for vulnerable residents.

### 3.4 Political mobilisation

Political mobilisation in Innerfavoriten appears limited and pragmatic, with city officials reporting comparatively weak organised civil society compared to other districts and minimal protest around WieNeu+ and the Supergrätzl. An exception was a small, demand-side action by nearby students from the local school, who called for the Supergrätzl traffic-calming and redesign to be extended to their street.

From the private-development perspective, in general, mobilisation increasingly takes a media-led, affective form. Developers describe campaigns and protests framed by personal perceptions of nuisance or loss (noise, construction, alleged heritage harms), often amplified by negative messaging rather than legal arguments. They note that small groups coalesce, with only a few persisting to invest time, and suggest a gap between emotional claims and what is legally actionable.

“People are basically just trying to get into the media, simply to create a bad atmosphere, to spread negative slogans, then to organise protests and so on, which of course can be justified. When something new is created and there’s noise right outside your door, you obviously don’t want that at first, and initially you only see the downsides, and that’s becoming more and more prevalent. [...] So I believe it’s being pushed outward a bit more, no longer focused on genuinely legally grounded aspects as it used to be, but rather on personal feelings and personal opinions.” (Real-estate developer)

Across these views, alignment lies in observing that mobilisation in Innerfavoriten is initiated, if happening, by very small groups or individuals and remains modest in scale. Disparities concern its character and trajectory: city officials see little organised resistance (e.g., against noise in front of ground-floor apartments due to new urban furniture on sidewalks in the Supergrätzl) and even supportive demands for the extension of benefits (e.g., students demanding the extension of the Supergrätzl towards their school). At the same time, developers emphasise a broader trend of media-driven opposition and emotion-centred narratives around urban change.

See 3.2 for more specific insights into political mobilisation, as this topic in Austria is closely connected to governance structures and participation.

### 3.5 Socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive)

City officials frame the socio-ecological benefits of Innerfavoriten in terms of adaptive reuse, affordability, and child-friendly public space. The administration highlights activating city-owned vacancies (e.g., a long-empty MA34 building now leased to associations and cultural initiatives) as a low-cost way to strengthen social infrastructure. Officials argue that sustained maintenance and renovation are socially and economically preferable to wholesale rebuilding, supporting long-term affordability alongside ecological gains. Planners note early but tangible effects from the Supergrätzl: tree planting and cooling formats, improved stayability, and safer streets where children can play, with parks and youth facilities acting as key anchors. They report no evident immediate negative effects, while acknowledging that impacts will materialise over time. Officials also point to “cooling zones” as a pilot-to-policy format that scaled citywide and to upgrades that benefit long-term tenants reverting to their rent category.

"I think we have tried a lot of things, which usually come anyway - more greenery, more quality of stay, more play opportunities. I think the biggest plus point is simply that the children can run outside, and there is no car or whatever, no truck whizzing by." (Planner)

Civic actors describe the changes as largely well-received, even if not yet empirically studied. Within the Supergrätzl, they underscore Erlacher Park’s heavy use and see value in added seating and a pedestrianised core that distributes pressure and enhances everyday use. More broadly, they link neighbourhood greening and building-side improvements to microclimatic cooling and residential comfort, especially where air-conditioning is impractical, anticipating that these co-benefits will grow in importance.

Private developers emphasise local co-benefits from ground-floor programming and tenure choices (e.g., a curated retail/food concept and keeping units in rental tenure rather than converting to ownership), seen as socially beneficial and supportive of an urban mix of infrastructure. On upgrades, they report acceptance of decarbonization and thermal renovation among younger owner-occupiers, willing to back long-horizon investments.

Social housing providers focus on direct tenant gains. Thermal renovations and heating optimisation reduce bills, sometimes yielding refunds after monitoring adjusts heating curves; decarbonization is framed as a service to tenants and the environment without rent increases. Common-area photovoltaics reduce operating costs in proportion, and clear communication of post-renovation savings supports acceptance. Providers associate comprehensive upgrades with improved maintenance levels, better living quality, and lower tenant turnover— an equity benefit as well as a socio-ecological one; even modest per-square-meter contributions can deliver noticeable improvements.

"Whether heating retrofitting or not, what I always do now is a heating optimisation, [...] I make sure that I get monitoring and see if the heating curves fit, if they are adapted to the new climatic conditions anyway. [...] This the tenants only notice once they suddenly get the bill back with a lot of credits, because we have these savings effects." (Social housing provider)

Across groups, alignments include substantial perceived gains in public-realm quality, cooling and greening benefits, affordability co-benefits from maintaining rather than rebuilding, and wide acceptance of thermal/decarbonization measures—especially when operational savings are transparent. Disparities are modest and relate mainly to timing and measurability: officials and civic actors note that benefits and potential displacement effects are hard to quantify early on; social providers stress that financial returns accrue to tenants rather than to the provider, requiring subsidy alignment to sustain delivery.

"We have to put money into maintenance again and again, but in the long term, it will be cheaper than if we had to build all this from scratch. And this strengthens the economic, social aspect of affordable housing in addition to the ecological aspect, which is always very important. I think there is hope behind all that." (City official)

### 3.6 Socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative)

Negative social impacts in the Innerfavoriten area centre on affordability risks, uneven burdens during retrofits, and the catalytic effects of public space improvements. City officials acknowledge that urban upgrading can interact with pricing dynamics, noting that significant investments (U2 extension, Neues Landgut, Supergrätzl) contribute to long-term area valorisation, even if trends predate current initiatives. They also raise a justice debate about whether all substandard housing should be eliminated, given demand for very low-cost, substandard private rental units among residents with limited means. At the same time, the tenancy law protects long-term tenants from rent hikes, and accessibility for newcomers often declines as rents rise in the refurbished stock.

"It can, of course—take the Neues Landgut development area, which is already basically completed—be a factor of upgrading, and the Supergrätzl could also become something like that. The U2 will have a station there; the metro is being extended. All these issues are potential factors for change and transformation, for the upgrading of this area. That the area is experiencing a certain upgrading is for sure—but this has been underway for decades already." (City official)

Civic actors report early signs of commercialisation pressures around new buildings and high-end ground-floor uses, amplifying local perceptions of upgrading (e.g., Gudrunstraße case). Tenant support organisations highlight cost pass-throughs from greening (mainly maintenance and increased irrigation of green facades), which tenants, particularly in large estates, may bear. In the private housing market, they observe tactics to displace incumbent tenants to enable conversion to ownership, often unrelated to decarbonization goals, and a broader trend of higher re-letting rents after subsidy periods end or amenities are added. While the local setting and Vienna's legal framework temper immediate displacement, civic services still encounter cases that require legal support and relocation negotiations to prevent forced displacement.

"We try to prevent it [displacement]. If people come to us, there are various options, up to and including legal representation covered by a fund. Not every old building is worth preserving, and there have been cases (e.g., in the 14th district) where, after a lot of pressure, an

agreement was reached so that tenants were given apartments in the new building.” (Tenant support organisation)

Social housing providers flag affordability tensions in implementation. Even when aiming to provide low-cost housing, maintenance and improvement contributions (Erhaltungs- und Verbesserungsbeitrag, EVB) increase procedures (§ 18 procedures), and centralising heat supply can raise individual bills; in some situations, switching energy carriers in already thermally upgraded buildings can increase costs, undermining tenant acceptance. They note that cumulative burdens (from service charges to more maintenance-intensive measures) can push some tenants to consider moving, especially if rent increases exceed income levels.

Private developers cite construction-related disruptions as a negative effect, disproportionately affecting older residents who fear noise, dust, and intrusive work in their homes. They also acknowledge a gentrification risk intrinsic to investment logic: targeting neighbourhoods “on the rise” can accelerate valorisation and future price setting, with experimental or innovative projects justified by expected resale or rent gains.

Across all actors, there is recognition that upgrading can increase costs for some residents (through rent revaluation and operating charges) and that vulnerable tenants require safeguards and alternatives. Disparities centre on causality and thresholds: city officials emphasise long-term trends and legal protections; civic actors stress tactical displacement and cost pass-throughs; social providers highlight specific mechanisms (EVB, energy switches) that raise bills; developers foreground disruption burdens while conceding investment-led valorisation. Overall, negative impacts remain plausible but uneven, contingent on tenure, subsidy timing, and implementation choices, with mitigation hinging on strong tenant protections, careful cost management and transparent communication.

### **3.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors**

Tensions in Innerfavoriten revolve around regulatory and competency barriers that fragment responsibility, as well as the city administration's potential to influence the use of retrofitting subsidies. City officials describe how cross-departmental planning (e.g., Quellenplatz/Laxenburger Straße) advanced through participation but stalled at implementation due to jurisdictional limits and political decisions outside the city administration department MA25's remit. Proactive owner outreach was long constrained by data-use rules, prompting the city to anchor contact rights for climate-relevant activities in the Vienna Climate Law to enable coordinated engagement. Even with such tools, the legal framework keeps most measures voluntary, while procurement thresholds allow owners to bypass competitive processes for contracts under €400,000, undermining leverage for comprehensive solutions. In condominiums, unanimity requirements for heating switches make upgrades in substandard buildings especially hard to realise. Private developers sometimes negotiate upzoning and redevelopment, then proceed to offer private-market housing units rather than subsidised, rent-capped units, while the city laments lost opportunities to anchor affordability. This visualises the power dynamics between private developers and the limited capacity of public institutions to enforce affordability requirements through subsidies. More broadly, rent regulation and substandard conditions collide: keeping units cheap but poor-quality is untenable, yet upgrading risks rent pressure for newcomers.

“Regarding this new-build project, I don’t recall the name, at the beginning we put a lot of effort into it. It’s a whole perimeter-block development, definitely a densification project. It involved demolition and new construction, and it was upzoned in advance. Was this part of WieNeu+? It was already in the planning phase and then with the project we also worked hard on zoning matters – the board was very keen to see it happen – it did become a project, but in the end it was carried out as a privately financed development. That was a great pity for us.” (City official)

Private developers articulate their own contradictions: they seek leeway from strict rent regulation to recoup higher-standard renovations while acknowledging this can fuel gentrification dynamics. They see cost structures making retrofitting viable only with heavy public subsidies and long financing horizons, and recognise the broader investment logic of targeting districts with upward trajectories (accelerated by transit expansions such as the U5 subway line) while expressing concern about balancing climate imperatives with affordability.

Civic organisations, on the other hand, push for stronger mandates and protections to overcome fragmented ownership. They argue that subsidies alone are insufficient and call for legal bans on new gas boilers, rules to enforce decarbonization against minority vetoes in condominiums, and safeguards to prevent investment costs from being passed onto tenants. They also highlight the ongoing risk that upgrading (retrofits) raises rents, even if operating costs may fall; object subsidies (brick-and-mortar subsidies) are meant to damp costs but leave open distributional questions.

“This fragmented ownership structure makes renovations impossible in many cases. You need much stricter legal requirements—for example, in five years, no new gas boilers should be installed; it simply shouldn’t be allowed anymore. And trying to do it through subsidies and incentives isn’t sufficient. We need clear legal mandates, and investment costs mustn’t be passed on to tenants; owners should pay, potentially with subsidies.” (Civic organisation)

Power dynamics coalesce around who decides, who pays, and who benefits. Officials confront legal and competency constraints and incentive misalignments across landlords, tenants, and utilities; civic actors press for mandates and tenant protections against cost pass-throughs; developers push for economic viability versus rent controls. Contradictions were described as sharpest where climate targets meet affordability duties (LPHA, social housing providers) and where voluntary decarbonization rules meet fragmented ownership (private developers). Mitigation hinges on more explicit mandates, coordinated competencies, data-driven asset planning, and funding designs that reward building-services efficiency while protecting low-income tenants.

### 3.8 Innovative governance mechanisms

Innovative governance in Innerfavoriten couples social and technical agendas under WieNeu+: climate adaptation, decarbonization, and circularity are linked with neighbourhood quality, inclusion, and pilots. This is operationalised through area-specific, participatory grants (Grätzförderung, Grätzlmarie) and three pillars (build future, foster neighbourhood, foster innovation) that aim to upgrade the existing stock while testing formats at the district scale. Officials also frame careful, context-sensitive densification as a financing lever without broad upzoning in protection zones.

“We see WieNeu+ as connecting the social with the technical – climate adaptation, decarbonization, circular economy on the one side, and quality of life, social inclusion, and innovation on the other. In Innerfavoriten we set up two area-specific grants (Grätzförderung and Grätzmarie) tested there for the first time, and we work under three programme goals: build future, foster neighbourhood, and foster innovation, so we can upgrade the existing city while deliberately trying out pilot measures. Densification in the existing stock can help make projects financeable, but possibilities are limited; we designate protection zones and do not simply open the door to broad upzoning.” (City official)

Housing-security instruments underpin affordability within this innovation push. LPHA stress cost-covering rents under the Limited-profit Housing Act; increases occur only via voluntary agreements or maintenance contribution procedures, not general cost pass-throughs. In the private-regulated segment, rules such as capped rents for historical buildings, §63 WWSFG for subsidised attic extensions, and clauses reverting rents after 20 years temper long-run rent drift. Civic actors note that innovative emergency support programmes against evictions due to rent arrears or energy poverty, like the Wohnschirm, can act quickly but face demand and constraints.

“In the limited-profit sector, we operate under the principle of cost coverage: we may only charge rents that reflect actual costs, and we can raise rents only when those costs are proven in advance. We’re a limited-profit – so with rents we cannot earn anything – and that’s a key pillar of social sustainability.” (Social housing provider)

Technical and territorial mechanisms prioritise system-level solutions. City officials point to local energy networks that go beyond single-building solutions, district heating, greywater reuse, and a clear greening hierarchy: first trees, then large, ground-connected green, then façades/roofs. Social providers are standardising asset planning using energy certificates and building-condition audits; they push for central district heat supply for operational simplicity and tenant benefits, and deploy photovoltaics on flat roofs. Private developers advocate de-sealing, trees, and “sponge city” rainwater strategies, urging a more substantial cost–benefit focus in city planning.

### 3.9 Tourism and market pressures

Market pressures in Innerfavoriten are shaped by profit-maximizing redevelopment and short-term rentals. City officials note that many project companies avoid comprehensive, rent-regulated deep renovations, instead cherry-picking subsidizable items in complete refurbishments, which limits the city’s ability to regulate rents through requirements linked to subsidies. Landlords facilitating short-term rentals are often distant or corporate, weakening ties to the neighbourhood.

Civic actors emphasise speculative dynamics: low historical purchase prices, coupled with profitable condominium conversion and resale, produced high expected returns across the entire 10<sup>th</sup> district, drawing investor activity and generating so-called “problem houses.” The erosion of low-rise commercial or manufacturing buildings and their replacement with expensive ownership units pushes rents upward, and public-space upgrades risk primarily benefiting owners over tenants. A high share of short-term rentals (STR) persists because the district lacks designated Wohnzonen (areas where short-term rental is prohibited); this both

reduces available housing and facilitates illegal overcharging, especially for newcomers and first-time renters unfamiliar with rights. STRs also appear in new builds.

“In the 10<sup>th</sup> district, investor speculation has been strong: a Chamber of Labour study showed the highest return expectations here, because Gründerzeit houses could be bought cheaply, split into condos, renovated, and resold at high prices (...) We also have a high share of short-term rentals because there are no designated Wohnzonen here; that reduces available housing and enables illegal overcharging, especially for first-time renters who don’t know their rights. And short-term rentals are increasingly an issue in new builds as well.” (Civic organisation)

Private developers acknowledge gentrification risks while pursuing areas with “upward trajectories,” accelerated by rail and subway connectivity. Strategies include holding vacant properties for future projects and scaling attic extensions already permitted, betting on higher resale values in a rising market.

“Principally, as property developers, we go into neighbourhoods where we see the most potential and future potential. Values rise step by step, and we have to watch out not to gentrify – so we don’t end up creating housing that’s suddenly too expensive, everything hip and green, and we lose the affordable stock. The area is very well connected with the main station and soon the subway at Matzleinsdorfer Platz; that accelerates things, and it’s a place where people consciously try things out because they already see the upward trend and can spend more on pilot projects – simply because they can sell later at a higher price.” (Private Housing developer, I8b)

All in all, perceptions converge on intensified investor-led upgrading, rent pressure, and housing scarcity due to STRs. Tensions lie between public aims to secure affordability and investor strategies to maximise returns, with civic voices warning that public realm improvements and regulatory gaps (e.g., the lack of *Wohnzonen*) can amplify displacement risks.

### 3.10 Gaps in perceptions between civic groups and public agencies

In general, the interviews did not reveal explicit gaps in perception among civic organisations, public agencies, and public or social housing providers. Instead, differences emerged in the degree to which specific trends were perceived and in how proposed measures were evaluated. Civic actors call for strong legal bans (e.g., on particular heating systems), tighter controls on cost pass-throughs, and decisive action against financialised ownership and short-term rentals. They argue that voluntary coordination is insufficient and that upgrades to public space risk privileging owners over tenants. Public agencies, by contrast, emphasise soft-law tools—manuals and strategies—implemented collaboratively across departments within limited mandates. They leverage evidence-based greening and area programs but acknowledge a “jungle of subsidies” and a dependence on voluntary cooperation that cannot be imposed top-down. Social housing providers value this collaborative, networked governance (e.g., *WieNeu+ jour fixes*) but operate under cost-covering rent rules that constrain rapid innovation, diverging from civic expectations for swift, mandated change. Private developers highlight regulatory frictions (e.g., strict fire-safety requirements, attic

expansion obligations) and the need for economic viability, which contrasts with civic demands for affordability-first enforcement.

Especially around perceptions of gentrification, the perceptions between city officials and civic organisations do not reveal gaps but instead focus on the degree to which tendencies of displacement are already in force – in general, assumptions have been phrased with only caution on this issue. City officials speak cautiously about displacement, framing upgrading as a long-running trend accelerated by major infrastructure projects and constrained/delayed by legal tenant protections, while acknowledging regulatory gaps, missing long-term monitoring procedures on housing market dynamics around projects such as Supergäßl and limited leverage over the national tenancy law. Civic organisations, by contrast, describe (to different degrees) active displacement pressures: speculative condo conversions, investor-led “problem houses,” high STR shares enabled by the absence of Wohnzonen, illegal overcharging of newcomers, and public-space upgrades that risk privileging owners. Developers admit gentrification risks yet target “upward trajectories,” banking on higher resale values and expanding permitted attics, and social providers flag affordability strains (EVB, cost pass-throughs) that can push tenants to move. Thus, divergence centres on timing and intensity—city officials see gradual, structural valorisation; some civic actors see immediate, tactical displacement already underway.

## 4 Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Nordbahnhofviertel

### 4.1 Precedents and implementation

City officials and planners consistently frame the Nordbahnhofviertel as a long-arc urban transformation that began with a 1994 Urban Design Concept (städtebauliches Leitbild). Due to changed circumstances, e.g., railway tracks no longer needed and experiences with large central parks in other development areas, the City of Vienna, together with Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) as the land owner, launched an EU-wide, two-stage ideas competition in 2011.

“We had an urban design concept from 1994; it was very ambitious. But various framework conditions changed: the main train line was narrowed, creating space for new building plots, and ÖBB abandoned a track that had complicated the urban structure. The City of Vienna also shifted its educational facilities toward the campus model.” (City Official).

City officials stress that only one submitted project proposed a large central park configuration, which concentrated density at the edges and preserved a generous ruderal core as the “Open Centre” (Freie Mitte). The concept by StudioVlayStreeruwitz replaced a continuation of perimeter-block extension with the now-fundamental “dense edges—free middle” model<sup>10</sup>. This reframing is central to how city officials explain the current form: the selected design consolidated built mass, including high-rises, along the perimeter, thereby freeing the central

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vlst.at/en/prj/freie-mitte-vielseitiger-rand-2/#39>

ruderal area as a ‘rather wild’ park landscape (Freie Mitte)<sup>11</sup>, while still upholding the magnitude of residential and commercial areas embedded in the early Urban Design Concept. City officials and planners also emphasise why the two-stage competition format mattered institutionally. A two-stage process was chosen to ensure breadth and conceptual depth while protecting competitors from self-exhaustion in an initial screening round and allowing promising but under-elaborated concepts to mature in the second round.

“I think only one other competition project also had a generous green space. But essentially, the submissions focused on some small, compact urban park in the central area. But Vlay’s concept was the only one that, in this radical way, densified the edge areas to free up the centre” (Landscape Planner)

The further development of the ‘Urban Concept Idea’ into a ‘Urban Design Concept’ involved not only different administrative units of the City of Vienna, but also explicitly linked to participatory processes, such as neighbourhood cafés and citizen dialogues, between May 2013 and September 2014 (see 4.2 for details and Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 2015a). The Urban Development Committee approved the Urban Design Concept in March 2014. In 2015, the City of Vienna published a 200-page manual on the urban design concept, commissioned and under the lead authorship of StudioVlayStreeruwitz (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 2015b), giving the project a new title “Freie Mitte – Vielseiter Rand” (Open Centre – Versatile Edge) with the latter also emphasising not only housing, but also commercial uses. The manual summarises the participatory process and the key concept, and details the built infrastructure, mobility, green and open spaces, neighbourhoods, and sustainability.

Civic actors embed the area’s development within a broader history of bottom-up engagement and advocacy around the central green, ruderal area. Founded in 2012, members of the ‘IG Lebenswerter Nordbahnhof’ (Interest group Livable North Station), amongst others, became crucial actors in the subsequent planning process, meeting at organised meetings in the neighbourhood. They recount how the publicly commissioned Urban Renewal Offices (Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung) convened a regular “Nordbahnvierteltreff,” where residents and initiatives could exchange information, assess proposals, and later feed concrete demands and ideas, for example, keeping the “wildness” of the central landscape, into formal participatory processes of the Urban Development Concept. This strand of the narrative must be understood in the context of residents/civic groups using the derelict railway landscape informally, and of their shifting role in actively participating in the co-design of the planning process that enabled the preservation of much of the ruderal character of the central green area. From their perspective, the Free Centre is thus described as a deliberate, plan-based element that was sought after but needed a civic representation to be implemented appropriately and treated as a leftover of development economics.

To develop the built environment at the edges of the case study area, a consortium of housing developers was formed. The consortium consists of insurance companies and limited-profit and commercial housing developers (Vienna Insurance Group (VIG), ÖVW, STRABAG Real Estate, KIBB Immobilien according to Peer and Forlati 2022, p. 78). Rather than the usual practice of selling individual plots of land to individual developers, housing providers report ÖBB’s staged building plot sales to a compact consortium. The necessary framework

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<sup>11</sup> Ruderal landscapes are brownfield sites that have been left untouched for a long period of time (usually several years). Vegetation develops dynamically in these areas.

agreements were comprehensive, negotiated among the City of Vienna, ÖBB, and the consortium, and signed in 2016. The contract between ÖBB and a property development consortium was signed, which stipulated that the consortium would develop and gradually acquire land from ÖBB.

“And one thing that is very important for ÖBB is to have a single point of contact, to know when money will flow, and the model that slices everything up in advance and then sells individual building plots creates a great deal of work. So at Nordbahnhof, they thought: no, we’ll do it differently; we want to have a consortium across the table with whom we can develop this together.” (Housing developer)

## 4.2 Participation and governance (procedural)

City officials and planners describe a multi-stage participatory architecture woven into design governance as a key element. Before the EU-wide ideas competition, two public consultations physically presented evolving plans and attached local priorities, mainly preserving trees, youth and sport amenities, local accessibility and mobility, to the competition brief. The extensive, city-led participation process followed in 2013/14 culminated in a formal urban design concept and, subsequently, a detailed handbook that planners still use as an operational reference, alongside the Quality Assurance Board that developed the building plot.

The participatory format of the one-year-long consultancy itself mattered: planners recall large “topic-table” sessions for around 100 people, co-hosted by technical experts and resident representatives, with rotations so everyone could weigh in on each topic, plus smaller continuity groups selected by a lottery that met every two weeks. These formats helped move from general preferences to concrete planning discussions without having to restart at each meeting, because participants learned how the administration “ticks” and what was feasible to modify.

“And we worked on different topics, in different groupings, with different representatives of the population, and contrary to the original assumption, at least mine, we received primarily positive feedback on this draft by Studio Vlay.” (City official)

Civic actors similarly emphasise the neighbourhood-oriented, continuity and low-threshold channels that run in parallel to episodic, strategic processes. The mixed composition, with fixed stakeholders and lottery-selected residents, worked together over a year and was perceived as particularly valuable.

“Twelve people per focus group ... a mixed group with different approaches ... it worked well. [...]” (Civic initiative representative)

Hence, civic actors echo planners' perception that participation strengthened legitimacy rather than fundamentally altering the core concept. Over time, the civic initiatives organised information events during the participatory process themselves, while after the approval of the urban development concept, a neighbourhood management team, financed by the consortia, organised a monthly meeting for locals, which became the 'everyday door' for issues ranging from dog zones and benches to rail noise. This sustained engagement during the construction and occupation phases.

The building consortium model, which organised architectural competitions and, after 2017, the assessment and installation of a quality assurance board for each building lot, is framed by city officials as a key governance feature to ensure the qualities defined earlier and to channel results into building plans. The cooperation agreement between the City and ÖBB demanded quality assurance: an interdisciplinary advisory board with representatives from politics and administration (MA 21, MA 19), master planners, external experts (architecture, open space, social sustainability, housing), consortium developers, and resident delegates via IG Lebenswerter Nordbahnhof reviewed projects against an agreed catalogue (Peer and Forlati 2022, p. 58). Housing providers emphasise that the “urban design concept–manual–quality assurance board” triad provided continuity and parcel-by-parcel alignment, reducing fragmentation across multiple architects and developers, and was complemented by site-level walk-throughs to verify delivery and enable learning for future projects.

From the providers’ perspective, the consortium reduced transaction costs and enabled coherent phasing with the City and ÖBB. A framework agreement (similar to what later became institutionalised as urban development contracts (städtebaulicher Vertrag) fixed key qualities: shares of affordable and subsidised housing; and ground-floor uses and mix, which then informed joint architectural competitions for mixed-tenure plots. The Quality Assurance Board is described not just as a review gate, but as a collaborative forum where solutions, e.g. for the alignment of ground-floor uses, for the coordination of greening so that tree/shrub bands, rain gardens, and green margins that align across parcels reads as one continuous landscape, or the development of play areas could be sharpened with multi-actor input, reducing fragmentation and enabling ‘one district’ standards across multiple developers and architects.

“We coordinated the competition in advance ... we jointly juried the competition with the private (market-rate) partner. ... We also paired different architectural teams and said: This part is good from you, that part is good from you. Now, in the second round, develop a joint concept that somehow incorporates these qualities.” (Housing developer)

A central governance challenge concerned the Freie Mitte. Civic organisations and the participatory process explicitly demanded ‘greenness’ in the form of preserving the wild, ruderal character, keeping existing trees, protecting species, while providing amenities for young people, sports and dogs. Planners noted that the extensive workshops and smaller neighbourhood meetings confirmed these priorities and fed them into briefs and designs (I2a). Initially, the ecological case for wilder urban green spaces, tied to species protection and ruderal habitats, was contested. The administrative unit usually responsible for park management remained sceptical about how to maintain those areas, as the concept goes beyond conventional park templates and includes elements of nature protection. However, as reported by planners and civic representatives, acceptance shifted after administrative benchmarking with other cities (e.g. Berlin’s Gleisdreieck). Based on this, the administration adopted a new zoning category that allows for dual use (park and nature protection), formal nature protection filings for protected species, ecological site supervision and multi-year monitoring. The broader implication of these claims is that the Nordbahnhofviertel’s participatory governance is as much about internal, cross-department and cross-developer alignment as it is about participatory tools.

“This zoning category was newly created ... to bring the secondary use from nature protection into the designation.” (Landscape Planner)

While civic interviewees assess the participatory process during the establishment of the urban design concept as broadly effective and legitimating, they judge the participation once residents moved in and everyday issues surfaced as falling short. After the occupation, persistent concerns, most notably regarding excessive train noise well beyond everyday levels, were, in their view, not adequately addressed in subsequent decisions. This fuels frustration and reinforces their insistence on low-threshold channels to distinguish one-off disputes from systemic issues and to keep engagement alive in everyday use.

“Participation was great—until the very end; now facts are created, and no one can have a say.” (Civic initiative representative).

### 4.3 (In)equity (distributional)

City officials, planners and housing developers describe distributional equity as incorporated into the project’s design through a combination of subsidised, affordable, price-capped (*preiswert*) and freely financed segments, anchored in a framework agreement that contractually sets tenure shares and quality targets. Interviewees emphasised that the protected segments together constitute the majority of units, with market-rate limited to one third, and that these commitments were translated into parcel-level decisions via the quality assurance board and the development manual. Price-capping in the “affordable” category is presented as a negotiated, time-bound stabiliser (20-year, indexed cap) that emulates dampening effects without direct public subsidy, with a permitted surcharge of 2€ for high-rise buildings to reflect construction and operating costs. Furthermore, when the affordable category expires after 20 years, it can only be applied to new contracts, leaving existing contracts untouched. Furthermore, rental contracts under this scheme are unlimited in duration. In most cases, this housing was delivered by limited-profit housing associations (LPHAs). City officials also stress the avoidance of park-front exclusivity and the embedding of subsidised or price-capped projects along green edges, so access to amenities and environmental quality is not stratified by tenure.

“It was always intended: two-thirds subsidised or price-capped and one-third market-rate.” (Housing providers)

Furthermore, housing providers’ understanding of equity operates at the policy, building, and unit scales, offering a diversity of apartment types and locations within the building. They explain the “preiswert” category’s 20-year, indexed cap as an instrument to dampen market effects across mixed-tenure plots, noting that an uplift for high-rises (reported as around €2/m<sup>2</sup>) was allowed to avoid underfunding of tower operations while keeping overall affordability targets intact. Providers add that internal rent distribution based on a utility value (*Nutzwert*) enables them to spread rent targets across units with different attributes (orientation, floor, exposure), keeping larger family units relatively affordable within a cohesive offer. On subsidised housing, providers point to the City’s Smart housing programme’s role in reaching lower-income households (see Glossary for details about the programme), often in partnership with local NGOs for allocation and support. They underscore that Smart units are spread

across subsidised building plots and building types, including along green edges, to avoid tenure clustering and to secure access to amenities. However, it also reported that, in today's developments, the number of subsidised housing units would be higher and the amount of price-capped rents would be lower because, at the time of development, the "subsidised housing" zoning category, which would have foreseen 50% of units as subsidised, had not yet existed.

"We already collaborate in the background or during competitions with partners like Neunerhaus or Volkshilfe, reserving certain contingents for them, because they can target exactly these men and women. The goal for the NGOs is: we want a contingent from the Smart quota, because our clients really need every euro." (Limited-profit housing developer)

Despite the framework agreement, providers and city officials also emphasise that joint architectural competitions for mixed-tenure plots were co-juried, and that architectural teams were recombined to integrate the "best parts" into a shared concept for the second round of their project proposals. Here, the Quality Assurance Board functioned as a collaborative forum to refine solutions for ground-floor alignment, continuous greening across building plots, the provision of playgrounds, reducing fragmentation and enabling equal standards for the whole development. High-rises, initially envisaged in greater numbers, were reduced in later iterations and positioned to balance exposure to benefits (views, proximity to green spaces) and burdens (rail corridor) with affordability.

Civic actors, meanwhile, foreground demand pressures and the lived experience of access. They report exceptionally high competition for subsidised dwellings, with long registrations and consistently narrow selection windows. Access to subsidised homes is not only a function of tenancy rules but of timing and luck. Finally, while acknowledging that towers are not all at the park edge, some civic voices, housing providers and planners perceive spatial symbolism in placing towers financed by private funds near green edges, interpreting this as a sign of capturing the green value, even when other green edges host subsidised or price-capped homes. While other providers and city officials respond that towers also sit near the rail corridor or further south, thus breaking a uniform "first row at green" pattern and widening exposure to both benefits and burdens. Furthermore, they note that the absence of fences on the ground floor and open edges were zoning conditions to ensure permeability with the large open centre. They also note that open-space alignment worked well at several plots, though not uniformly. This underscores the need for robust instruments and ongoing coordination to sustain equity in access to and environmental quality of green space beyond initial planning.

„The outcomes of the quality assurance boards show that coordination of open space worked very well on some plots, but did not work at all on another." (Landscape Planner)

#### 4.4 Political mobilisation

City officials and planners depict mobilisation as supportive of the "Open Centre" and less oppositional than in many comparable inner-city transformations, emphasising how acceptance was consolidated through iterative engagement. However, planners and civic initiatives describe one significant momentum of political mobilisation: the reframing of the wild, ruderal area as a positive public asset after initial scepticism by the City of Vienna.

“Subsequently, there were talks with politicians; we went door-to-door to politicians, we went to the district, and to the director of the City Gardens, and said: this can work, it’s not actually a risk, because if you look at Berlin, there’s the Gleisdreieck, and it works!” (Landscape Planner)

From the perspective of the planners and the civic initiative, mobilisation is narrated as a broad effort to persuade, explain, and translate an initially unconventional open-space model into a universally accepted public space in the centre of the district, a role later reinforced by formal boards and handbooks.

Following that, housing providers describe political mobilisation primarily through the lens of governance and delivery. They recall early neighbourhood resistance, especially from informal green users, and highlight how structured instruments (competitions, the quality board, and parcel-spanning design appointments) channelled disputes toward negotiated solutions rather than anti-development stand-offs. The justification for the Open Centre and the dense perimeter is presented as a long-run public good, supporting a cohesive fabric with robust green access, and providers underline that the emergent shared language around this urban model has made it easier to address the granular frictions in interfaces and operations.

Civic actors frame mobilisation as pragmatic and iterative, focusing on upholding the Leitbild's promises rather than opposing densification per se. For them, the central narrative is one of sustaining community input to preserve the wild, ruderal character of the Open Centre and to steer details when effects became visible (e.g., around rail noise).

“Our interest was that we simply wanted what the City had promised itself in the Urban Development Concept.” (Civic Initiative Representative).

At the same time, civic residents also express frustration about late-stage decisions made in specific sub-areas. While not a general critique of the process, these comments highlight instances where the opportunity for input was limited in decision-making, e.g. in railway operational matters. Thus, mobilisation takes the form of both top-down communication and bottom-up watchfulness, focusing on a greening project in which details about solutions and possibilities, rather than fundamental oppositions, have sparked the most enduring discussion.

#### 4.5 Socio-ecological impacts (positive)

City officials and planners consistently frame the Open Centre as a wild, ruderal space that performs ecologically under intensive use, with ruderal habitats and protections for species such as the European green toad, common lizard, and red-backed shrike. They describe a governance setup for filings, ecological oversight, and monitoring to manage a dynamic balance between nature protection and public recreation. Civic actors support the participatory demand for a wilder character and youth/play functions, while also surfacing operational concerns (e.g., rail noise, maintenance touchpoints) that sit alongside, rather than against, the core concept of wild, open centre. Regarding the delivery and maintenance of the nature-oriented park, city officials argue that the approach is comparatively economical due to low-intervention maintenance and developer-funded play areas, with related operational implications for housing developers. Taken together, most interview accounts depict a park

that is both ecologically intentional and heavily used, with broad social support and mostly mundane points of contention.

“Acceptance is extremely high. Most criticisms concern a broken bench or dogs off-leash.”  
(Planner)

Regarding benefits, housing providers underline microclimate and thermal comfort benefits associated with greening at the building scale. Façade greening and deep-rooted planting systems are linked to notable cooling of adjacent interior spaces during heatwaves, especially behind mature vegetation; providers emphasise survivability and reduced irrigation demand where ground connection is possible on (public) land. As one interviewee noted from direct experience:

“The microclimate in the planting troughs is sensational in high summer and very pleasant.”  
(Limited-profit housing developer).

Providers also point out that parcel-spanning landscape appointments helped reduce fragmentation at edges, enabling more coherent green interfaces and play-area distribution, which in turn supported both ecological functions and social use. Civic actors clearly emphasise improvements to everyday liveability. They report heavy use of park corridors for walking and cycling, strong uptake of play facilities, and the activation of ground floors that increase daily presence. In high-rises, co-working and shared rooms signal that dense forms can sustain community life when interior spaces are generous and well-managed. Civic users articulate the park’s “wild” texture as a qualitative good in itself, a distinctive complement to other green areas elsewhere in the city and describe the Open Centre’s network effects as extending liveability improvements beyond the new build development into adjacent quarters.

#### 4.6 Socio-ecological impacts (negative)

City officials acknowledge that the Open Centre’s landscape quality created a branding effect that improved the marketability of nearby freely financed housing. It is noted that although two-thirds of homes have a price-regulation mechanism via contract, freely financed housing tended to rise in price. Housing providers and civic actors add that macroeconomic shifts, mainly construction cost inflation, interest-rate hikes, and tighter credit rules over the last years, have further raised hurdles, especially for mid-income-oriented market ownership. They connect current access difficulties to credit constraints; some mid-sized ownership units became harder to sell as interest rates jumped from about 1% to 4–4.5%, making these units unaffordable for mid-incomers, while top-end buyers remained less constrained. In turn, civic actors and housing providers report that this is fuelling demand in the private rental market, and residents also report high rent levels in market products (e.g., €2,000/month for 87 m<sup>2</sup>). Against this background, civic voices caution about notions of affordable housing, noting that even with price-capping, the absolute levels remain a crucial affordability barrier for many households, pushing them into smaller units or toward price-capped products whose caps may still feel high.

“You always have to be careful when saying ‘affordable.’ At the moment, nothing is affordable, so to speak.” (Resident)

In terms of building-related greening, housing providers point to operational costs and locational burdens that affect perceptions of quality and affordability. They point out that increased operating costs due to planting containers and irrigation must be communicated transparently as potentially increasing operating costs, especially in subsidised housing, where expectations and cost structures are of significant importance. Housing providers also stress that towers near the rail corridor are inherently disadvantaged on upper floors acoustically, an issue of location rather than greening, which complicates a uniform sense of quality across high-rise products. However, it should also be noted that, across interviewees, such granular burdens do not negate the overall acceptance of the Open Centre or the neighbourhood's liveability. Still, they help explain why household-level experiences diverge.

From various perspectives, green and amenity-led upgrading is considered one of several factors driving area change. While city officials and planners acknowledge that the Open Centre's branding boosted market prices in the privately financed segment, they also point to structural drivers, such as fixed-term tenancy contracts (*befristete Mieten*), which they describe as driving gentrification in nearby areas. Civic actors and housing providers also refer to broader transformations (such as new metro stations and a new university campus) that predate and amplify the effects of the new-build developments. Housing providers have observed price increases in neighbouring streets due to infill and attic extensions, and have noted high prices for local attics in the local area. Providers also report that early-phase prices roughly doubled by later phases for some products due to increased construction costs, with civic actors describing tranche-based price adjustments within the same projects.

“The big driver is fixed-term leases ... And that is the engine of gentrification, because the rents get more expensive each time. [In the Stuwerviertel] there is the advantage that there are still some unlimited main leases ... and gentrification proceeds slowly as a result. In the Volkert- and Alliertenviertel, it is a bit more dynamic, since the new construction started next door.”  
(Planner)

The most persistent everyday burden is rail noise. Residents on upper floors near the corridor report low-frequency transmission even with windows closed, and say they wake up early as services resume. Some even claim that people move out because excessive rail noise is definitely too loud. Providers and city officials agree that the towers closest to the tracks are acoustically disadvantaged, which makes it challenging to maintain a consistent level of quality across high-rise properties. Seasonal access and lighting issues also arise: in early winter, initially, timber path closures were implemented for safety reasons, which constrained movement for strollers and wheelchairs. Users also report tensions with insufficient illumination at the Open Centre for safe use in the darker months, which had to be limited for nature protection reasons.

#### **4.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors**

For all stakeholders, maintaining the Open Centre as wild and free as possible is a hard-won common good that requires constant defence against attempts to deviate from the original design concept. Planners and civic actors recount episodes in which additional uses or programme changes threatened to encroach on the open core. While some of these pressures were resolved without permanent loss, they demonstrate the ongoing challenges associated

with the park's utilisation. City officials and planners also recall institutional friction in the early years relating to the wild character of the Freie Mitte. The Vienna City Gardens unit (MA 42) initially rejected the idea of a wild, ruderal landscape as a park, insisting on more conventional designs. Acceptance only ensued after a benchmarking trip and the creation of a special zoning category and care regime. This demonstrates the need for greater coordination between administrative units, as non-standard landscape models require new institutional capacities and maintenance procedures, such as mowing calibration, amphibian channel management and invasive species control, which typically exceed the scope of standard park operations.

While safeguarding the large, ruderal middle required shifting building density to the edges, city officials and housing providers reported pressure on affordability measures in taller buildings, which have higher per-unit costs and stricter fire and technical standards. City officials/planners describe how high-rises were initially accepted as a logical counterpart to preserving the park, but were later scaled back when it proved challenging to deliver subsidised units within tower typologies. The resulting recalibration relocated subsidised shares to lower blocks and concentrated price-capped or market units in towers. The implication is that the initial allocation of square meters had to be tested against regulatory and cost realities, with the consequence that the 'dense edges' could not mean subsidised housing units in high-rises. Providers point to the need for persistent, lot-spanning design alignment to maintain edge quality coherence over time, especially given heterogeneous development teams and shifting market conditions. A limited-profit housing provider stated plainly:

“High-rises are simply another world. Those cost ceilings in subsidised housing cannot be met.” (Limited-profit housing developer).

Civic actors, for their part, highlight power asymmetries at the micro-level that challenge the rhetoric of openness. They point to enclosed private gardens along sections of the “Stadtwildnis” and to cases where developer consent acted as a gatekeeper for resident dialogues on building-specific issues, potentially narrowing channels for voice even within an overall collaborative model (I3a; I7a\_I8a). An example of the physical manifestation of such asymmetry was reported: “Those private gardens were actually enclosed with a wall.” (I3a). Together, these accounts underline that the Nordbahnhofviertel’s governance, while unusually integrated, still confronts frictions at the intersections of institutional definitions, cost ceilings, and everyday symbols of enclosure and access.

City officials describe how leadership changes disrupted continuity, even though the current district leadership remains firmly committed to completing and upholding the agreed-upon qualities. This turnover made process memory and intermediary bodies (e.g. the Quality Assurance Board) more important in maintaining a consistent approach through cycles of changing political leadership. Across interviews, it is acknowledged that civic actors filled the gaps when formal participation tailed off after the initial processes. As they positioned themselves as advisors, idea generators, or networkers, they brokered agreements between departments and developers, pressed for commitments based on the urban development concept and the handbook, identified the right decision-makers, and maintained confidential, trust-based dialogues so sensitive topics wouldn’t “blow up” publicly. Their stance was always

supportive of the city's stated goals, yet they were insistent on delivery, which helped sustain legitimacy amid political shifts.

“We talk to everyone, but we don't pass on what we hear to the outside. [...] If it doesn't work with one person, where does it work then? Is there a superior? And that's how we worked.”  
(Civic Initiative Representative)

## 4.8 Innovative governance mechanisms

Overall, all interviews consistently credit an interlocking toolkit for steering a complex, multi-actor process over many years as innovative. This toolkit comprises a framework agreement with ÖBB, an Urban Design Concept with a detailed handbook, iterative architectural competitions for the building plots and reviews by the Quality Assurance Board. The early, formalised collaboration between the city council and ÖBB is widely regarded as the foundation that established roles and cost responsibilities, as well as a target tenure mix, over an extended delivery period. City officials and planners emphasise that the framework agreement, which was approved by the council, created certainty and momentum at a time when parts of the administration were still cautious. While housing actors broadly agree that this approach was effective, they also highlight areas of opacity and non-binding elements, such as documents that were not published, which could undermine leverage in the future. While civic voices largely accept the agreement as the backbone of governance, they add that civil society's role was to ensure that both parties remained committed to the promises outlined in the concept.

“Housing developers showed a strong interest in implementing the concept” (Civic Initiative Representative)

Furthermore, another innovative aspect is that the urban design concept was operationalised through a detailed handbook and a concise quality catalogue. City officials and planners describe these as 'soft law,' translating intent into actionable rules on height, edges, through-routes, and ground-floor use. These rules feed directly into the review and approval process. City officials even characterise the production of the handbook as a research-like effort that raised the level of technical guidance and consistency. Housing practitioners treat these documents as practical tools for guidance and coordination across plots and teams. Civic actors also use the documents to hold the city council and developers accountable for their stated intentions once formal participation structures have concluded. However, designers and civic groups caution that such guidance can become ineffective over time if it is not backed by binding enforcement, as actors learn to satisfy only minimum thresholds. They advocate for stronger, sustained design oversight by the City rather than a multi-stakeholder setting.

“Yes, the handbook refines the outcomes and develops them further ... It is the basis for the well-functioning Quality Assurance Board ... with very, very concrete rules and requirements ...” (Planner)

Repeated architectural competitions consistently across all building plots are seen as transparent checkpoints that sustain quality while enabling the coordination of very different building types. Stakeholders agree that architectural competitions for towers and developer competitions for subsidised plots provided structured moments to test proposals against the

handbook’s rules. Housing actors add that collaborative formats pairing teams to co-produce cross-plot concepts were used to avoid siloed schemes, to internalise area-wide principles, and to prevent minimising greening efforts due to cost constraints on individual plots, as this would have required tremendous coordination. Officials emphasise that competitions worked best when channelled through the qualities defined in the urban development concept manual.

“At the time, it was relatively new; now it’s almost standard” (City official)

Civic interviewees support the mechanism but underscore the need for robust post-jury follow-through to prevent later value engineering that undermines jury intent. The Quality Assurance Board is consistently portrayed as an innovative forum that has become mainstream and extends oversight beyond building permits into a life-cycle process. City officials credit the Board with making quality transferable across plots and preventing actors from quietly undercutting standards. Housing actors emphasise that repeated reviews have forced alignment among multiple developers and architects regarding façades, sections, ground floors, and community provisions. Civic representatives value their seat on the Board as a channel for accountability and continuity. However, they also caution that the Board must continuously monitor and push for quality, and that these efforts must be paired with enforceable obligations. Otherwise, standards may slowly erode as stakeholders revert to the cheapest or easiest acceptable option.

“Competitions need sustained oversight after the jury to avoid sliding to the smallest common denominator” (Civic Initiative Representative).

## 4.9 Tourism and market pressures

Rather than attributing current pressures to tourism, city officials and planners situate them in macroeconomics and financialisation. They note that demand for subsidised and price-capped segments remains high, while stricter credit conditions and higher rates have slowed mid-income-targeted market ownership, leaving some units unsold. Housing providers add the historical context of a boom in free-market housing as an investment vehicle between 2014 and 2019, followed by a regime shift as bank loans tightened, interest rates rose, and commercial partners paused or exited longer developments, while limited-profit housing developers continued development. Civic actors confirm both financialisation and boom-era pricing strategies in the towers, recalling tranching releases with stepwise price increases and investment units, in which many people bought them as investment properties to rent out privately.

“The fat years are over ... we’re not a high-speed boat like the commercial players, but a steamship ... we value continuity.” (Limited-profit housing developers)

Housing providers also emphasise the importance of timing. Since the delivery process spans several years, cohort effects mean that earlier, freely financed products (pre-2021 tenders) can end up being cheaper than later, subsidised ones, once construction cost spikes and financing shifts have been factored in (I3a). They also describe tranche-based release strategies employed during the low-rate boom, which pushed asking prices up across successive releases in some towers. To prevent micro-unit dominance in the free-market

segment, for instance, the Quality Assurance Board conducted a rigorous review of economic and typological factors to maintain a balanced overall mix. Housing providers also state that shocks were managed through cooperative adjustments with the City and general contractors in 2022.

“Earlier freely financed products can be cheaper than later subsidised ones. Phases after 2021 faced steeper construction costs.” (Limited-profit housing developer).

Civic actors highlight rent issues and how households cope with them. They highlight the difference in cost between freely-financed rental units, which cost around €17–€20 per m<sup>2</sup>, and subsidised or price-capped units, which cost around €10 per m<sup>2</sup>. They also observe that many households rent smaller properties to stay within their budgets. Across these accounts, therefore, amenities and the Open Centre provide a 'brand uplift', but interviewees consistently attribute the most significant changes to macroeconomic shifts in interest rates, credit and construction costs.

#### 4.10 Gaps in perceptions between civic groups and public agencies

A central perception gap emerges regarding participatory processes. City officials describe a consistent approach to participation, starting with the Urban Design Concept, competitions, and the Quality Assurance Board. They present this as evidence that early participation led to tangible results and that these results remained consistent over time. However, civic actors credit the initial participatory process but emphasise a subsequent lack of engagement once the buildings were occupied. They highlight unresolved everyday issues, such as rail noise, winter path closures, and lighting restrictions. Therefore, the gap is less about whether participation occurred and more about whether procedural justice extends to everyday operations.

In contrast, issues surrounding market pressures, investor presence and the 'green edge' largely reflect a consensus rather than disagreement: most stakeholders accept that macroeconomics and financialisation, rather than tourism, drove boom-era pricing and the current mid-market slowdown. They also agree that Vienna's substantially regulated sector mitigates classic green gentrification dynamics. Civic accounts supplement this with specific details (e.g. renting smaller properties and the occasional underuse of certain park-front blocks), which refine rather than contradict the official diagnosis.

## 5 Critical Analysis: Vienna

Vienna's green transition in the housing sector is being implemented alongside a long-standing hybrid housing model, in which a large, limited-profit/municipal sector coexists with a sizeable historic, regulated private rental market from the Gründerzeit, which has been exposed to deregulation and market forces over the last few decades. The two contrasting case study areas, Innerfavoriten, which focuses on retrofitting and NBS-led renewal in a dense Gründerzeit stock, and Nordbahnhof, a large, centrally located brownfield densification area with a central wild, ruderal area, reveal how different intervention typologies interact with tenure segmentation, governance instruments, and (changing) macro-economic conditions.

## 5.1 Uneven social impacts of green transition interventions

In the case study area Innerfavoriten, the Supergrätzl and related cooling and greening were implemented quite recently. It is too early to say how the implemented NBS will improve the microclimate, but street usability has improved the quality of life. While immediate displacement is mitigated by robust protections within municipal and limited-profit stock, which are also prevalent in the neighbourhood, inequalities exist within the private rental sector. Three mechanisms shape these inequalities: (1) rent pressures upon renewing a tenancy or after a subsidy period ends (if retrofitted with subsidies) in the private rental sector, (2) costs associated with green maintenance and building retrofits (e.g. higher operating and irrigation costs; EVB procedures) being passed on (to different degrees in all segments), and (3) selective redevelopment or condominium conversion in mixed-tenure or privately owned Gründerzeit buildings. Short-term rentals (due to the absence of Wohnzonen in parts of Favoriten) reduce the supply of affordable housing and can enable landlords to overcharge newcomers. Fixed-term leases and fragmented ownership in condominiums increase bargaining asymmetries and slow down decarbonisation efforts, creating a myriad of justice trade-offs over who pays, who decides, and who blocks the implementation of green initiatives in buildings.

The study showed that early, perceptible impacts are present in Innerfavoriten. The Supergrätzl project has reallocated street space to prioritise pedestrians, providing shade and cooling, and making the area more appealing. While city officials and civic actors acknowledge the potential for increased property values from combined investments (the U2 extension, the Neues Landgut project, and the Supergrätzl project), they also note that long-term upgrading preceded these latest projects. Private-market pressures are already evident in selective conversions, rising rents under renewed contracts, and the prevalence of short-term rentals (STRs). Furthermore, cost-pass-throughs for retrofits and green maintenance can increase net housing costs for specific properties. As WieNeu+ operates within a voluntary, owner-led renewal landscape with low annual renovation rates, the distributional effects will unfold gradually through continuous rental contract replacements, post-subsidy rent adjustments and cumulative operating costs. While this lowers the risk of dramatic neighbourhood turnover, (early) monitoring remains crucial. However, public institutions implement monitoring procedures for climate effects; for housing market dynamics, in-depth monitoring is not foreseen in the area.

In Nordbahnhof, where densification efforts are combined with a large NBS anchor in the form of protecting a large wild, ruderal area that integrates nature protection, biodiversity conservation, and recreational uses, positive outcomes of the “Freie Mitte – Vielseitiger Rand” are mostly perceived as the high everyday use and broad acceptance of the Freie Mitte. But also that the housing model deliberately embeds housing equity considerations by strategically fixing tenure shares from the outset. Two-thirds of the housing-dedicated square metres were meant to be subsidised or price-capped rental units. From a tenant security perspective, this also means unlimited rental contracts in the subsidised and price-capped segment, while spatial mixing of different tenures along green edges aims to establish equal access to nearby green space. The combination of these elements tempered classic “green gentrification pressures” in the form of exclusionary housing development areas with a clear upmarket focus.

At the same time, one-third was considered market developments, including condominiums and private rental units. The strongest affordability and accessibility stressors are currently driven by macro-economic shifts (e.g. construction costs, interest rates), which have: (1) shocks prevented middle-income buyers from accessing ownership units, (2) segmented demand toward rentals with substantial inequalities in rental prices between the subsidised/limited-profit (€10/m<sup>2</sup>) and free-market private rental segments (€17–€20/m<sup>2</sup>), and (3) yielded tranche-based price escalations in high-rise towers delivered during the boom. Especially for the latter, the Freie Mitte's branding effect is very likely to amplify market attractiveness for ownership and private rental units. Another concern documented is that extensive greening can raise operating costs (e.g., planters/irrigation) on the building level, whilst perceived to improve liveability, especially during hot summer days. A key finding in the Nordbahnhof case also highlights that high-rise buildings near the rail corridor face acoustic burdens, potentially counteracting liveability gains from greening and dampening capitalisation through reduced quality. Greening impacts are therefore practically always traded off against other factors.

Across both case study areas, the consequences for affordability, accessibility, and the risk of being priced out differ sharply by intervention type. Small-scale public NBS (Innerfavoriten's Supergrätzl) improves free access and heat resilience, while affordability effects are indirect and lead to a gradual price-out in unregulated rentals. Municipal/LPHA tenants remain protected mainly. NBS on buildings sharpens affordability frictions at the building scale: planter-based greening and irrigation can raise operating charges, benefiting residents with improved comfort but selectively burdening those most price-sensitive; where deep-root planting on public land substitutes, cooling gains come with lower cost pass-through. By contrast, a large park-scale NBS (Nordbahnhof's Freie Mitte) broadens accessibility and stabilises liveability at the district scale. Here, gentrification manifests mainly through branding premium locations in freely financed products. At the same time, accessibility for low- and middle-income residents is provided through ex-ante tenure mixing and unlimited, price-capped contracts along the green edge.

Densification's affordability dynamics are driven more by macroeconomic and typological costs than by amenities. Interest-rate and construction-cost shocks, not the park, priced out middle-income buyers in Nordbahnhof and diverted demand into higher-rent market rentals. Furthermore, high-rises concentrate operating and compliance costs and therefore sit outside subsidised cost ceilings, pushing protected tenures into mid-rise blocks and segmenting access to upgraded units by income rather than by place.

Retrofit produces different distributional risks along segments. In LPHA/municipal stock, cost-coverage rules, subsidy timing, and consent practices translate efficiency gains into stable or lower net housing costs and broad access to benefits. However, even in this segment, retrofitting, specifically in combinations with other measures such as green façade constructions or heating system change to district heating, can lead to higher operating or energy costs. In private and mixed-tenure buildings, depending on the construction year before or after 1945, operating pass-throughs (combined with a lack of tenants' knowledge of rights and legal claims) can raise net costs despite energy savings, while unanimity and financing hurdles exclude low-liquidity owners from upgrades, fuelling selective pricing-out via rental contract renewal and post-subsidy rent increases.

## 5.2 Case studies situated in a historical and governance context

From a city-wide perspective, Innerfavoriten, as a case study, reflects Vienna's long arc of population growth and arrival dynamics into a dense, overheated Gründerzeit fabric where socio-demographic vulnerability is pronounced: larger households, high shares of non-Austrian citizens, including many third-country nationals and relatively low purchasing power. These profiles are the legacy of Vienna's role as a service-economy hub and migration magnet since the 1990s, with growth intensifying demand in precisely those pre-war private-rental areas that the city historically relied on as "arrival zones". Against this backdrop, the green transition in the existing housing stock reflects Vienna's tenure segmentation: a strong municipal/limited-profit backbone alongside a regulated, but ever more liberalised, private rental stock from before 1945 and a deregulated private context for buildings constructed after that period. These mixed arrangements in neighbourhoods stabilise incumbent tenants yet leave newcomers and fixed-term leaseholders more exposed to amenity capitalisation and selective upgrading.

Governance in Innerfavoriten is strongly public-driven, but it is calibrated to the constraints of the existing stock. Urban renewal traditions evolved through base and total renewals as well as Thewosan energy retrofits managed by wohnfonds\_wien. WieNeu+ retools that tradition for climate and circularity, linking technical upgrades with social goals and deploying intermediaries (GB\*) for low-threshold participation. Crucially, this is not a laissez-faire setting: the city sets frameworks (Smart Climate City Strategy, building-code greening mandates, Vienna Climate Act enabling outreach) and orchestrates cross-departmental alignment. Yet it cannot compel deep decarbonization or wholesale rent reform in private stock. Condominium consent rules and fragmented ownership constrain collective action, making the uptake of retrofitting dependent on subsidies, timing, and trust.

Nordbahnhof reframes Vienna's response to population growth and densification needs in a centrally located brownfield, translating decades of public-driven planning into a district-scale model that integrates nature, housing, and accessibility from the outset. One limitation of the project, however, is the lack of new municipal housing, which the City announced in 2015 after municipal elections, and the first buildings of this program opened in 2019. Also, the zoning category "subsidised housing" was introduced in Vienna only later. Hence, it was not applied at Nordbahnhof, where the price-capped segment was introduced instead. This is important because, in subsidised programmes, a higher share of Smart Apartments is required, thereby guaranteeing greater accessibility for low-income groups through price-capped one-time tenant contributions. Therefore, while equity concerns are directly incorporated into the design, the outcome remains middle-class-biased, favouring families, mid-income workers, and subsidised-eligible households. This mirrors citywide trends in a diversified service economy that is rather middle-class-oriented, especially compared to Innerfavoriten, for instance.

While the city used to an ample extent land released by ÖBB for inner-city brownfield redevelopment, it was only at Nordbahnhof that it delivered this large, ruderal open centre with dense edges. The Freie Mitte's dual-use zoning (park + nature protection) and ecological monitoring institutionalise urban wilderness, an innovation born of civic mobilisation and administrative learning. In contrast to the constraints of an existing stock in Innerfavoriten, Nordbahnhof's new-build context allows the city to proactively put in place distributional safeguards in housing and public access, which would be much more challenging to

implement retrospectively in existing structures. Hence, governance is strongly public-steered and unusually integrated amongst a variety of stakeholders. A City–ÖBB framework agreement codifies roles, cost sharing, and tenure shares. An Urban Design Concept and detailed handbook operationalise “soft law” into actionable rules for multiple developers (limited-profit and market), while parcel-level architectural competitions and a Quality Assurance Board translate the concept into tangible outcomes.

### 5.3 Concluding Reflections

Innerfavoriten represents complex urban renewal with elements of soft densification, NBS implementation and site-specific retrofitting. It layers block/base renewals, energy retrofits, and selective densification measures, such as infills or attic conversions, onto a dense Gründerzeit fabric, complemented by street-level public NBS. Cross-cutting, decommodified housing provided by the municipality and limited-profit housing associations protects many existing residents. In a nutshell, additional stressors include rent increases in the private segment upon re-letting, speculative conversions, short-term rental intensity due to missing Wohnzonen, partial increases in operating costs from greening and retrofits, and construction nuisances.

On the contrary, Nordbahnhof is best classified as hard densification and NBS on a brownfield/infrastructural site in a municipality under housing pressure. It transforms a former rail yard into dense edges, including high-rises, around a large biodiverse dual park–nature protection zone. Decommodified housing is central, with roughly two-thirds of units subsidised or price-capped under unlimited contracts, while tourism or second-home pressure is not a primary driver. In Nordbahnhof, macroeconomic shocks such as interest-rate hikes, construction-cost inflation, and tighter credit conditions drive affordability and accessibility in market segments. The branding of the Freie Mitte adds a premium for market-financed units, and type-specific burdens include rail noise in towers and operating costs for specific greening systems.

Contrasted in their socio-spatial roles and governance logics, Innerfavoriten functions as an arrival area characterised by larger households, high migrant shares, and lower purchasing power, thereby heightening sensitivity to cost pass-throughs and speculative tactics in the deregulated private segment, even as the municipal/LPHA backbone stabilises stay-put tenants. By comparison, Nordbahnhof’s long-arc, plan-led brownfield redevelopment mainly focused on middle-income future residents, leveraging public land release and integrated design governance to accommodate growth. While institutionalising accessibility to housing and the quality of neighbourhoods in Nordbahnhof through mixed tenures in the LPHA and private segments, and nature protection, these equity-oriented arrangements cannot be readily replicated in existing neighbourhoods, such as Innerfavoriten.

In summary, decommodified, price-regulated, and secure (rental) housing remains the decisive stabiliser across both cases: Where it is present and binding, green transition benefits are broadly accessible without large-scale risks pricing tenants out. At the same time, institutions of the decommodified housing sector are struggling to finance and implement green transition policies due to regulatory and practical impediments. For new urban developments, integrating a diversified decommodified housing sector (both municipal and LPHA) would allow this stabiliser to further broaden distributional effects within high-quality,

affordable neighbourhoods. Where interventions rely on voluntary uptake within fragmented ownership and a deregulated private submarket, such as in historical neighbourhoods, justice outcomes hinge on empowering collective decarbonization with more explicit pass-through rules, restricting short-term rentals, and sustaining low-threshold rights and participation infrastructures. Overall, Vienna's model can essentially deliver climate-forward urbanism without large-scale displacement when affordability is hard-wired and governance is persistent.

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## 7 Appendix 1 – Glossary

### 7.1.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation (DE / EN)
<b>EVB</b>	<b>Erhaltungs- und Verbesserungsbeitrag</b> – Maintenance and Improvement Contribution (housing-related fee)
<b>GB*</b>	<b>Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung</b> – Area-based urban renewal and neighbourhood management (Vienna)
<b>KIBB Immobilien</b>	Austrian real estate developer
<b>KliP</b>	<b>Klimaschutzprogramm</b> – Climate Protection Programme (City of Vienna climate strategy)
<b>LPHA</b>	<b>Limited-profit housing associations</b>
<b>MA17</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 17 – Integration und Diversität</b> – Municipal Department for Integration and Diversity (City of Vienna)
<b>MA 18</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 18 – Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung</b> – Municipal Department for Urban Development and Planning (City of Vienna)
<b>MA 19</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 19 – Stadtteilplanung und Flächennutzung</b> – Municipal Department for District Planning and Land Use (City of Vienna)
<b>MA 21</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 21 – Stadtteilplanung und Flächennutzung</b> – Municipal Department for District Planning and Land Use (City of Vienna)
<b>MA 23</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 23 –Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Statistik</b> – Municipal Department for Economic Affairs, Labour and Statistics (City of Vienna)
<b>MA 25</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 25 – Technische Stadterneuerung</b> – Municipal Department for Urban Renewal (City of Vienna)

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation (DE / EN)</b>
<b>MA 42</b>	<b>Magistratsabteilung 42 – Wiener Stadtgärten</b> – Municipal Department responsible for the planning, maintenance, and management of Vienna’s public parks, gardens, urban green spaces, playgrounds, and urban tree stock
<b>ÖBB</b>	<b>Österreichische Bundesbahn</b> – Austrian National Railway Company
<b>ÖVW</b>	<b>Österreichisches Volkswohnwerk</b> – Limited-profit housing developer (Austria)
<b>SDGs</b>	<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b> – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
<b>STEP 2025</b>	<b>Stadtentwicklungsplan 2025</b> – Urban Development Plan 2025 (City of Vienna)
<b>STR</b>	Short-term rental
<b>STRABAG Real Estate</b>	Real estate development subsidiary of STRABAG (developer)
<b>Thewosan</b>	<b>Thermisch-energetische Wohnhaussanierung</b> – Thermal and energy-efficient residential building refurbishment
<b>VIG</b>	<b>Vienna Insurance Group</b> – Insurance group and real estate developer
<b>WEG</b>	<b>Wohnungseigentumsgesetz</b> – Condominium Ownership Act
<b>WWFSG</b>	<b>Wohnhaussanierungs- und Wohnbauförderungsgesetz</b> – Vienna Housing Promotion and Housing Rehabilitation Act

### 7.1.2 Terms and Concepts

<b>Term</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>§ 18 procedures</b>	Legal procedures under § 18 of the Austrian Tenancy Act (MRG), governing rent setting and adjustments for regulated apartments
<b>Base renewal (Sockelsanierung)</b>	Renovation of the building base and ground-floor zone (façade, entrances, structural elements) to improve usability and streetscape quality
<b>Block Renewal (Blocksanierung)</b>	Area-based urban renewal approach in Vienna that targets entire urban blocks

Term	Explanation
<b>Brick-and-mortar subsidies</b>	rather than individual buildings, combining building refurbishment, improvements to courtyards and semi-public spaces, energy upgrades, and social measures, typically coordinated through soft urban renewal instruments to enhance living conditions without displacement.
<b>Cooling Zones</b>	Public funding instruments for physical construction, renovation, or refurbishment of buildings (as opposed to social or rent subsidies)
<b>Developer competitions (Bauträgerwettbewerbe)</b>	Designated urban (indoor) spaces with heat-mitigation measures (e.g. air-conditioning) to reduce urban heat stress
<b>Gründerzeit</b>	Competitive tendering procedures where developers submit projects evaluated on design, sustainability, social quality, and cost criteria
<b>Schlichtungsstelle</b>	Historic period of rapid urban expansion in the late 19th century; also refers to dense, perimeter-block building typologies from that era.
<b>Smart Housing Programme</b>	Arbitration or conciliation board for housing disputes, but also for applications (by housing providers) to allow an increase of maintenance costs, such as § 18 of the Austrian Tenancy Act (MRG) (e.g. rent, maintenance, operating costs).
<b>“Soft Urban Renewal” (Sanfte Stadterneuerung)</b>	The programme delivers compact, space-efficient flats with low construction and energy costs, capped tenant contributions and affordable rents with open-ended leases, allocated under the same rules as municipal housing.
	Vienna’s (participatory) urban renewal approach, focusing on renovation without displacement, tenant protection, and social stability, was established in the 1970s

Term	Explanation
<b>Urban development contracts (Städtebaulicher Vertrag)</b>	Binding agreements between municipalities and developers regulating planning obligations (e.g. infrastructure, public space, affordable housing) are primarily financed by developers themselves
<b>WieNeu+</b>	Vienna refurbishment programme (building on the Soft Urban Renewal Programme) supporting comprehensive, high-quality renovation of residential buildings
<b>wohnfonds_wien</b>	As a semi-public organisation, it is responsible for providing and developing land for social housing construction and for managing the quality instruments 'property developer competition', 'land advisory board', and 'quality advisory board'.
<b>Wohnzonen</b>	Designated residential zones (under the Vienna Building Code and zoning law) where short-term rentals for tourist accommodation are prohibited or strictly limited, to safeguard permanent housing stock, stabilise residential neighbourhoods, and reduce pressure from commercial use of dwellings.

## 8 Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts

#	Position of Interviewee	Sector/company	Date of interview	Media
1	City official	City of Vienna	29.09.2025	In person
2	Representative Public Housing Agency	wohnfonds_wien	30.09.2025	In person
3	Representative of a civic group	IG Lebenswerter Nordbahnhof	13.10.2025	In person
4	Representative Limited-Profit Housing Association	ÖSW	20.10.2025	Zoom
5	Representative Civic Organisation	Stadtteilmanagement Nordbahnhof	21.10.2025	In person
6	Planner	Landscape Planning Studio	23.10.2025	In person
7	Real-estate consultant	Consulting firm	5.11.2025	In person
8	Representative of a Civic organisation	GB* 1100	6.11.2025	In person
9	Representative of Tenant Organisation	Mieterhilfe	10.11.2025	In person
10	Real-estate developer	Real Estate Association	10.11.2025	In person
11	Representative Limited-Profit Housing Association	EGW	18.11.2025	In person
12	Representative Limited-Profit Housing Association	BWSG	1.12.2025	In person
13	Representative of Public Housing Agency	Wiener Wohnen	13.1.2026	In person
14	City official	City of Vienna	29.1.2026	In person
15	Representative Limited-Profit Housing Association	Migra	26.1.2026	In person
16	Resident	Residential building Nordbahnhof	30.1.2026	In person

17	Planner	Landscape Planning Studio	3.2.2026	In person
18	Resident/Civic Initiative	Residential building Nordbahnhof	2.2.2026	In person
19	Resident/Civic Initiative	Residential building Nordbahnhof	2.2.2026	In person
20	City official	City of Vienna	3.2.2026	In person
21	City official	City of Vienna	9.2.2026	In person
22	Resident	Residential building Nordbahnhof	12.2.2026	In person

## 9 Appendix 3 – Visuals

### Innerfavoriten Visuals



Figure 6: Retrofitting and attic conversion in Innerfavoriten (private building stock). Source: Judith M. Lehner



Figure 7: G'mischter Block. Infill and densification in Innerfavoriten (private rental). Source: Judith M. Lehner



Figure 8: Densification through attic conversion (private building stock) and Superblock measures with traffic circulation control and modal filtering in Innerfavoriten. Source: Judith M. Lehner



Figure 9: Supergrätzl with traffic circulation control and greening measures. Source: Judith M. Lehner



Figure 10: Supergrätzl pedestrian zone and urban furniture in front of the school. Source: Judith M. Lehner



Figure 11: Supergrätzl tactical urbanism with visual placemaking interventions. Source: Judith M. Lehner

## Nordbahnhof Visuals



Figure 12: Nordbahnhof Freie Mitte Source: Michael Friesenecker

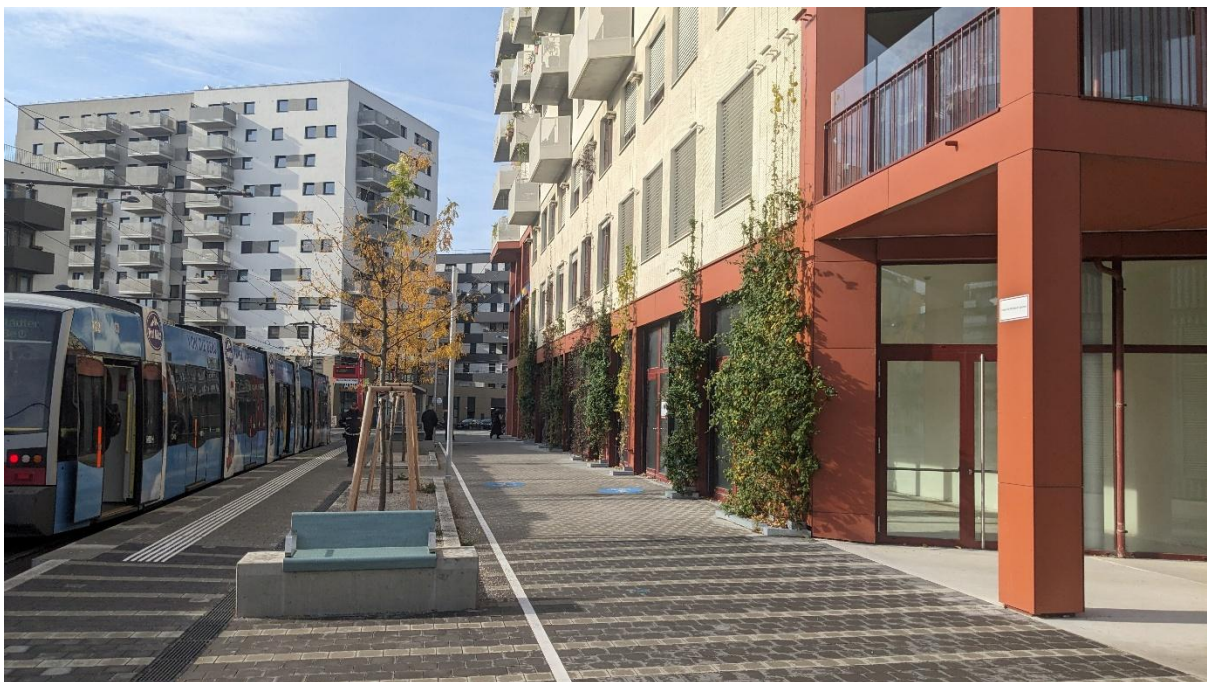


Figure 13: Nordbahnhof limited-profit housing (right side) with facade greening. Source: Michael Friesenecker

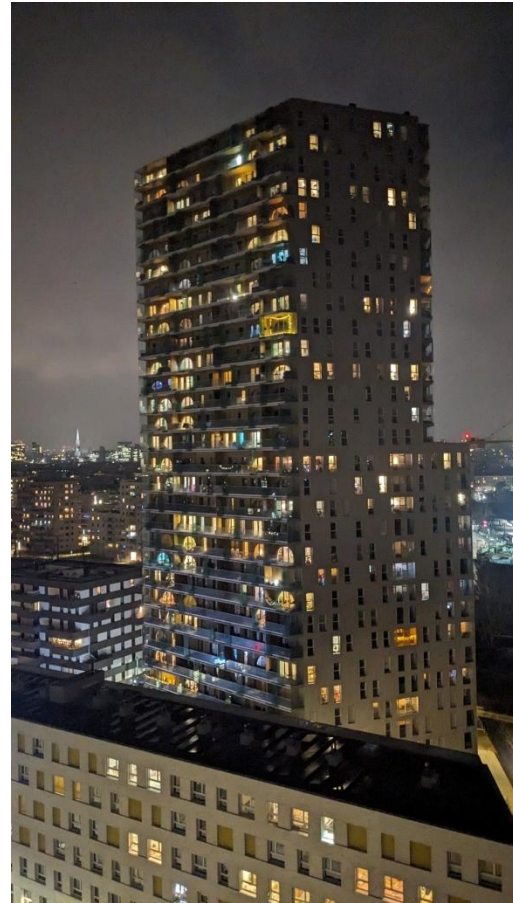


Figure 14: (left) Nordbahnhof freie Mitte. Source: Michael Friesenecker  
 Figure 15: (right) Nordbahnhof high-rise building. Source: Michael Friesenecker



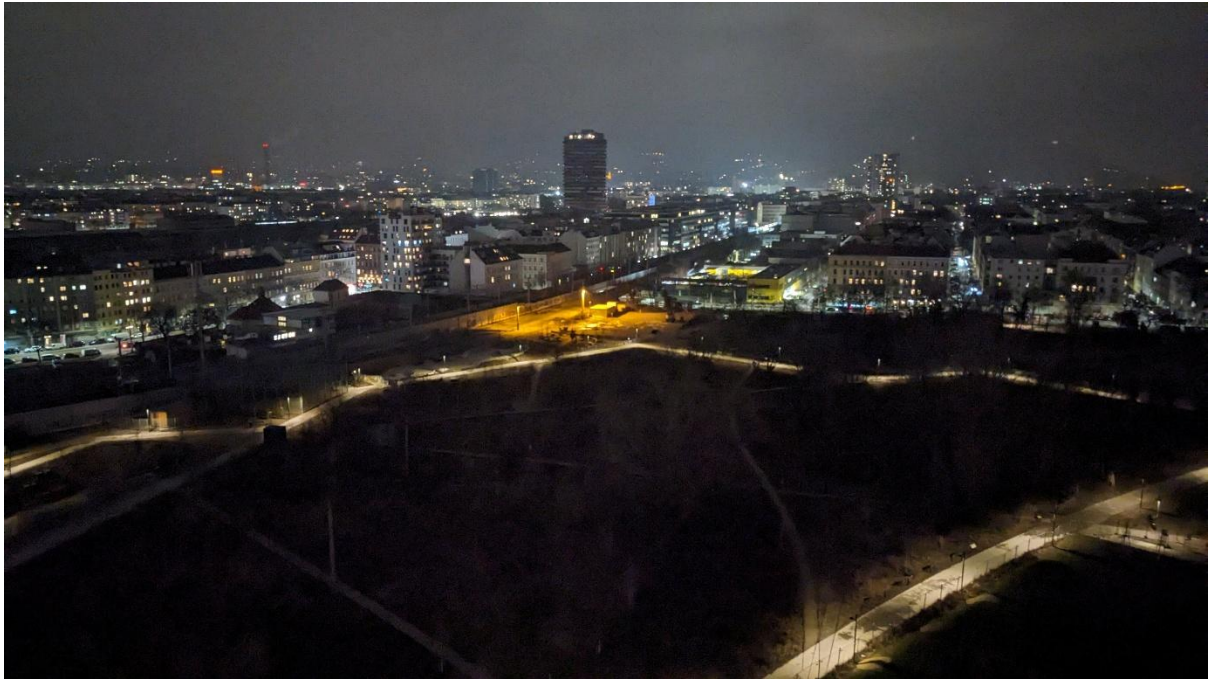
Figure 16: Limited-profit housing with facade greening and semi-public green courtyard. Source: Judith M. Lehner



*Figure 17: Limited-profit housing with semi-public green courtyard and public green areas towards railways. Source: Michael Friesenecker*



*Figure 18: Nordbahnhof rental as well as ownership housing next to rail tracks. Source: Michael Friesenecker*



*Figure 19: Nordbahnhof Freie Mitte at night. Source: Michael Friesenecker*