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Vienna 2025 - Growing Through More Sustainability, More Open-Mindedness and Participation

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**Vienna 2025- Growing Through More Sustainability, More Open-Mindedness and
Participation
By Maria Vassilakou**

Heading towards the 2 million mark Vienna, a green and social city with a high quality of life, has embarked upon a joint venture between administration, politics and citizens. Numerous programmes, initiatives and projects are supporting this development, making Vienna more sustainable, open and participatory step by step.

In 2010, for the first time ever, more people lived in cities than in rural areas. By 2025 the share of urban dwellers will amount to 70% of the world population. This trend towards urbanisation has become visible in Vienna too. Vienna currently has a population of approx. 1.8 million and is known for its dynamic growth and high quality of life. According to current population forecasts Vienna will cross the 2 million mark well before 2030. This also means more creativity, more ideas and more potential for development. It raises its status and the region surrounding it in Central Europe, contributing towards securing its future as it does. Vienna has dwelt on these issues for some years now and to give them direction has prepared and adopted the *Urban Development Plan STEP 2025* and the *Smart City Wien Framework Strategy*.

The new *Urban Development Plan STEP 2025* provides timely answers to current issues. It is aimed not so much at specific measures as to what is to be built and where but rather at giving a vision of Vienna and its future. STEP 2025 is committed to participatory urban development and urban planning and was prepared in a broad and intensive dialogue between politics and administration, science and economy, citizens and other stakeholders.

The *Smart City Wien Framework Strategy* is based on the guiding principle “securing top quality of life for everyone in Vienna while saving as many resources as possible” and specifies clear goals for the three fields of action: resources, quality of life and innovation up to the year 2050. CO2 emissions, for one, are to be reduced from currently 3.1 tons per inhabitant to 1 ton and all motorised private transport within the city boundaries is to be effected without conventional drive technologies. The Smart City Wien will not only define clear environmental goals but the full range of living environments for people in the city.

The following four theses may be derived from these two documents. They are considered incentives for urban development and urban planning policies in Vienna and are essential for a growing, sustainable, open and participatory city:

1) “Cities are places where people want to live without being forced to “

Cities must be places that treat children well. Why is that so? Children need the same things that everyone else does: open and safe spaces, room for recreation and physical activities, as well as the right tools to take in and experience their environment and nature. All of these qualities must be provided for within the city to put a halt to people’s yearning for a “house in the green belt” and the unwanted urban sprawl this would lead to. Inner city development must be “dense but beautiful“. Different tools, such as cooperative planning procedures, area management and urban development contracts must be provided to ensure that densely built-

up areas offer top living qualities. Attractive public spaces, useable green and open spaces, low-traffic and car-free areas are major factors in this development. People's self-management and their own initiatives must be boosted. Suitable mixes must be considered and allowed for from the very beginning when planning new urban development areas. Ground-floor zones may be given extra attention to promote urban life in newly developed areas. The objective is to create a liveable and fairly-shared city with active citizens and a sound social mix in all neighbourhoods.

- As Vienna grows multiple use of free spaces is becoming increasingly important. The action programme “**Grätzloasen**“ (local neighbourhood oases) launched in 2015 shows that spaces round the corner or in front of one's own front door can be put to new use. Private initiatives are supported financially and from the organisational point of view when it comes to implementing them. In 2015, 32 citizen initiatives were put into practice. These included small parks, street furniture, as well as sports and physical activities in public space. All of the above initiatives reflect the diversity of public space and strengthen the interconnection of people settled in a particular living environment.
- The city decided to establish an agency that is to help revive ground-floor zones offensively and flexibly, using as little red thread as possible. The agency “Kreative Räume” (creative spaces) will take up its work as early as spring 2016.
- Plans for larger urban development areas will involve citizens right from the beginning. The former Nordbahnhof (northern railway station) is one such example that is to show that urban districts can remain lively and attractive for the future. By 2025 it will be turned into an urban quarter that combines housing, work and leisure time and links up to the adjacent quarter. Ideas for the future and future coexistence in the new urban district Nordbahnhof were prepared in cooperation with citizens. To this end, a broad participation process entitled “a local neighbourhood sets the course” was launched. The “local neighbourhood knowledge” collected in the course became part of the new urban development mission statement. Central themes, which interested parties were invited to contribute their ideas to, were green and open space, building development, utilisation and mobility. The process was accompanied by numerous individual interviews and various other activities, such as a local neighbourhood café and a walk into the future with young people. As a follow-up locals will be informed of further planning steps and activities.

2) *“Cities are places where people meet to exchange goods, ideas and inspiration”*

The question behind this thesis is: where do cities happen? Where do people meet? Cities come alive as soon as people leave their offices or their apartments to step into public space. The quality of public space is essential for the quality of life in cities. It takes on a major integrative and communicative role in urban life. Thus it has to act as a meeting place, a place where people linger and communicate. In this respect recreational qualities, accessibility and usability are of the essence. Vienna has a fairly high share of green and open spaces. These must be preserved and, beyond that, must be connected to each other through a network of

open spaces or pedestrian routes. Vienna is exploring new ways of planning and designing public space and open and green spaces.

- For **Ottakringer Straße** – a 1.5 km street built during the Gründerzeit (years of rapid industrial expansion) in Vienna – several improvements and installations became necessary which gave way to new and redesign. Local residents and business people at Ottakringer Straße were involved at a grand scale in these innovative plans: not only did they turn the area into a more “liveable new Ottakringer Straße” they also rendered it more acceptable. The process clearly showed that common goals are of major importance for working together, building mutual trust and establishing trust in the project.
- The City of Vienna is currently preparing a **Thematic Concept Public Space**. The concept follows in the steps of the goals of STEP 2025, setting the course for how to manage urban free spaces, most of them squares and streets, in Vienna in the future. People’s needs and requirements are already a major focal point of the design measures involved. The thematic concept provides details for the approaches and qualities required for designing public spaces. It wants to strengthen dialogue with people. The thematic concept also includes strategies on how to manage streets and squares already redesigned, e.g. those trying to find a balance between commercial and non-commercial offers. The Thematic Concept Public Space will be ready by late 2016.
- **Schwedenplatz** – a 40,000m² square in the middle of Vienna, frequented by approximately 10,000 people on a daily basis, is to be redesigned in the coming years. To begin with a “mission statement for the future of Schwedenplatz” was drawn up to reflect the needs of users of this public space. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in the processing over the course of one year. Online participation and a direct dialogue box were made available for the purpose. Based on the mission statement, a competition for redesign was launched in autumn 2015. The first competition stage has already been completed. The jury selected six contributions from a total of sixty international ideas. The former were presented to local residents between 8 and 14 February 2016. For the first time ever it is possible to comment on contributions during an anonymous, still ongoing competition and thus to contribute actively to redesigning Schwedenplatz. The comments are forwarded to the competition jury to be used as specific recommendations and requirements for further development of design contributions in the second competition stage. This means that inclusion of interested citizens which began with the drafting of the “mission statement Schwedenplatz“, will be continued consistently during the course of the competition to be completed in June 2016.

3) *Living cities get people out of their cars and on to their feet.*

Of course this too is much about quality of public space. People want to enjoy spending time on their feet or their bicycles. Vienna is already a model city with regard to mobility: in 2015, 73% of people in Vienna used environmentally friendly traffic modes (footpaths, bicycle paths and public transport) and a mere 27% relied on their own cars. The Urban Development Plan

STEP and the Smart City Wien Framework Strategy has also set ambitious courses for mobility. Thus by 2025 only 20% of all distances should be covered by cars.

- To reach the different goals for mobility (such as modal split, mileage, safety) a **Thematic Concept Mobility** was prepared. The concept sets out 50 specific measures including expansion of infrastructure, strengthening of rental systems and consulting agencies. The concept was prepared in cooperation with a citizens' council. Individuals picked out from the civil register at random were allowed to apply for participation. A total of 20 participants were ultimately picked out taking into consideration a representative mix of age and gender.
- One way to effectively calm traffic is to introduce so-called **strolling zones** with equal rights for different traffic participants. The different groups must, of course, be made aware of the needs of others and respect these if the strolling zones are to be effective. Strolling zones are being established in Vienna ever since the statutory framework conditions for their introduction has been in place. The most well-known, largest and most successful example is Mariahilfer Straße.
- **Mariahilfer Straße** is Vienna's top shopping mile with tens of thousands of visitors daily. Attractive space for pedestrians and cyclists was becoming scarcer which called for a redesign. The objective was to promote open and integrative urban space. The street's image as a young, urban and environmentally friendly city was to be strengthened and its appeal in Vienna was to be further expanded. One of the biggest and most heavily discussed dialogue processes ever in Vienna was pulled off. Finally, local residents were interviewed and final decisions on the design were taken. Traffic was calmed, the two sides of the street previously cut off from each other by the traffic lane were linked with each other through strolling and pedestrian zones – new open space was created. Seating areas invite to rest and linger. Traffic in the whole area, including side and crossing streets, was calmed and decelerated.

4) Cities are places of dialogue and controversy

Taking into account that Vienna is a growing city, participation takes on a major role here. Why is that so? Growth and the urgent need for new housing must not legitimise “architectural blunders“. Anyone who witnesses construction activities on the neighbouring lot has the legitimate right to draw advantages from these, in other words, a balance of interests is absolutely essential. The quality of urban development in new urban districts can only improve if one includes the needs and concerns of local residents and their criticism at the right time. Participation, at any rate, must become a matter of course.

- The Vienna City Administration has institutionalised participation. A **staff office for citizen participation** has been established at the Department for Urban Planning. All urban development projects are accompanied by the staff office.

- The master plan for participatory urban development represents a **transparent set of rules**. It shows when and how participation works with urban development projects.

Vienna has carried out many participation projects in recent years and has gathered a lot of experience in this respect. Much was successful but did not always meet the full satisfaction and agreement of everyone involved. By way of summary, it is fair to say that we must join forces on the way to becoming a two million city.