

Strengthening Town and City Centres in Austria

The appeal of town and city centres as residential and business locations as well as places where to obtain local basic services seems to be declining inexorably. Today, town and city centres are often dominated by scarcely used public spaces and **vacant** buildings and shops. Strengthening and reviving town and city centres has become one of the **key issues for preserving the quality of life** for residents. In many municipalities, it is also the **basis for the tourism industry**. New trends are creating new challenges such as the growing use of online commerce, but also the tendency to increase surface area for commerce “on unused green land”. Many intra-urban centres are not only high-quality spaces for living and for business, but also help **save space**, promote **responsible handling of existing buildings**, **lower automobile traffic**, and thereby contribute to the **attainment of climate protection goals**.

The approaches take up to now have not been enough to lastingly strengthen town and city centres. Therefore, the aim today is to join forces to create new conditions **throughout Austria** to help counteract the decline of urban centres. The federal government, Länder, cities and municipalities plan to work together in a new quality to develop and preserve vital and multifunctional town and city centres. This would also contribute to the sustainability goals of the UN Agenda 2030, especially Goal 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities” and Goal 13 “Climate Action”.

Therefore, **ten expert recommendations were developed** within the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning – ÖROK (see overleaf).

The core message of these recommendations is to create “standardized boundaries for town centres” and “integrated urban development schemes” on the basis of a new “urban development funding” concept.

- ***Urban development funding can serve as a driving force for investments in urban centres:***
An urban development funding concept for the entire territory of Austria with mandatory quality criteria – similar to the successful model applied in Germany – would benefit small cities and towns. Prerequisites for obtaining financial assistance would be defined boundaries for town centres and integrated urban development planning with citizen participation.
- ***Financial assistance for housing construction and tax reliefs would support revitalization of town and city centres.***
In order for town and city centres to remain alive, it is important for people to actually live there, because this is the only way to ensure that local commerce as well as food and drink businesses can thrive. Therefore, residential space in town and city centres should receive special financial assistance.
- ***Ensuring the long-term location of enterprises and facilities in urban centres***
Town and city centres are defined by their function as a place where to obtain basic services. The relevant businesses help revitalize their environment. Thus, the goal must be to locate and retain the largest possible number of enterprises and facilities in urban centres.

The “Expert Recommendations for Strengthening Town and City Centres” were prepared within the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) under the leadership of the Federal Chancellery, Department II/4 - Secretariat of the Advisory Council for Building Culture and the Salzburg Land within the scope of the ÖREK-Partnership of the same name and were adopted by the “Commission of Deputies” of ÖROK. The recommendations are available to all ÖROK partners – federal government, Länder, cities and municipalities – for implementation in their areas of activity.

Expert Recommendations for Strengthening Town and City Centres

1. Establishing the goal of strengthening town and cities centres in legislation

Federal and Land laws as well as the relevant instruments of spatial planning should include suitable objectives for strengthening town and city centres to secure the existence of long-term initiatives that work to achieve this goal.

2. Creation and expansion of suitable organizational structures to strengthen town and city centres

Suitable structures to strengthen town and city centres should be established both at the federal level and also at the Land and municipal levels.

3. Definition of demarcation lines for town and city centres

The definition of demarcation lines for town and city centres to serve as guidance for the municipalities when taking further steps to strengthen town and city centres.

4. Preparation of integrated urban development or similar schemes

Integrated urban development schemes or similar schemes are to be defined as a requirement for obtaining funding.

5. Viewing town and city centres from the perspective of a regional context

Regional cooperation projects between municipalities and also existing regional schemes and structures should be used to support efforts to strengthen of town and city centres.

6. Informing the population and involving citizens to strengthen town and city centres

Transparent information policies and the participation of specific target groups should help to raise awareness of the significance of town and city centres in the communities.

7. Raising awareness and mobilization of private actors as partners for strengthening town and city centres

The involvement of private actors in relevant measures should be promoted to strengthen town and city centres.

8. Goal of higher funding to create housing in town and city centres

Consideration should be given to higher funding for schemes to promote the creation of housing in town and city centres.

9. Securing the existence and expansion of enterprises and facilities in town and city centres

To secure support for strengthening town and city centres over the long term, efforts need to be made to encourage enterprises and facilities to locate there.

10. Support for experts in matters relating to building culture in town and city centres

The support of experts for issues relating to building culture should be enabled to promote high quality.

The complete collection of the expert recommendations and further information on the findings of the ÖREK Partnership are available on the ÖROK website at: <https://www.oerok.gv.at/>