3rd Austrian Building Culture Report

English Summary

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Scenarios and Strategies for 2050

English Summary

Vienna, 2017

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Policy Areas and Scenarios

The Third Austrian Building Culture Report builds upon the foundations of the first and second reports, but the perspective of the study has changed. Rather than recommending steps leading from an observation of the current situation to a better future, it challenges readers to envision the current situation from the perspective of critical future scenarios. The narrative content sketched here was derived methodologically from a broad-based review of expert opinions on political, social, cultural, and economic trends. To create manageable scenarios, the authors first identified and delimited content that is especially important for building culture in Austria. To this end, policy areas characterized by an intense utilization of resources were defined, an aspect that also makes them important to the overall development of Austria. Of these, the following four policy areas crystallized as narrative paths for the scenarios:

- *Landscape as a resource*
- *Cities and regions*
- *Housing*
- *The public sector*

These were projected into the future in various plausible variations and combinations. The year 2050 was chosen as the time frame. At preliminary roundtables of a diverse group of experts, building blocks for the development of scenarios were created. Envisaged as alternative narratives to the most likely trend, these development scenarios encompass a range of possible different futures.

A total of 22 development scenarios spanning all policy areas were created in this way and then combined into sets to produce narrative building blocks. The 1,440 sets were evaluated through a qualitatively based and quantitatively supported consistency analysis of their reciprocal effects. The goal was to find the combinations of individual narrative building blocks that yield the most harmonious dominant narrative. In a process of selection, three scenarios were chosen from these dominant narratives for further elaboration. The narratives were developed in a structured critical discussion at a second series

of roundtables of experts. The scenarios could thus be sketched out *globally*, *integrally*, and *nationally*, and then concluded in a final round of consultation with experts.

The *Global* Scenario

This scenario is premised on the dominant role of a liberalized and globalized economy. In Austria, the state has continued to perform its legislative and leadership functions within a very narrow framework. The social fabric is largely determined by market forces. It is assumed that imbalances in both income and wealth distribution have continued to grow. Due to the anticipated economic growth, assurance of certain social minimum standards by the state, and the availability of inexpensive energy, raw materials, food, and labor on the global market, larger segments of the population have been prevented from falling into poverty.
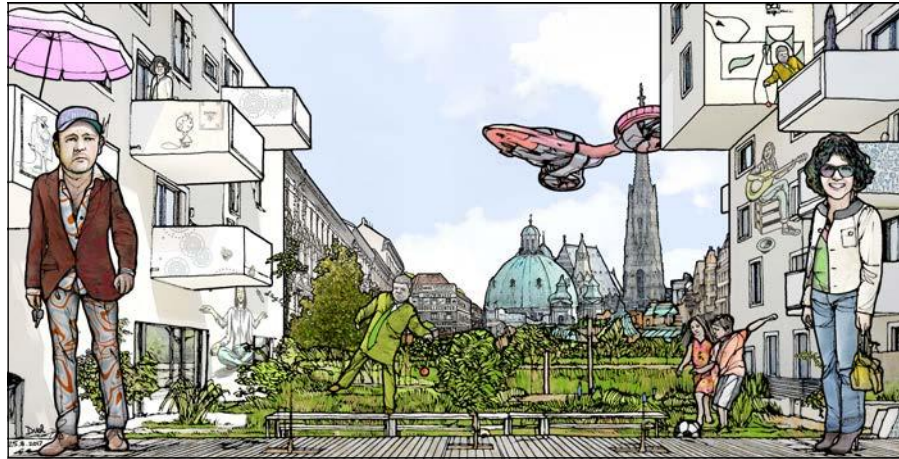
The landscape is seen primarily along high-usage traffic corridors and is characterized by the interchange of functionally separated suburban zones and areas used entirely for agricultural and industrial purposes. Landscapes are often represented digitally. The upper timberline has risen significantly. Even high alpine areas are now free of glaciers. The landscape has been shaped in parts by the demands of tourism. Targets for climate protection and biodiversity have been extensively weakened after international debate. Space is configured by the convergence of conurbations and large-scale areas used intensively for

agricultural management. Settlements in remote rural areas are abandoned. Land use and sealed surfaces are increasing. Food production, energy production, raw material extraction, settlement development, tourism, recreational use, transportation systems, and infrastructure all compete for space.

Housing production is subject to private business interests. Accordingly, the various housing opportunities are oriented to consumer sectors and dependent on location. High-density development has built up in central locations. Peripheral and rural areas are extensively developed. New construction has brought about great transformations. Existing buildings are preserved only in the luxury sector. Social groups are highly segregated. Only the high-end sectors offer customization, with standardized housing predominating the middle sectors. Social housing availability is marginal, prompting the growth of informal housing solutions.

To remain competitive in the European and international markets, the administration has been streamlined and is now concentrated mainly at the national level. Public authority has been limited to carrying out core tasks to maintain the state. Municipal control and authority have been largely transferred to private actors. This is also true for all spatial zoning and construction agendas. Building projects are carried out by a few international corporations acting as general and total contractors. The mid-market design scene has shrunk to a mere handful of offices specializing in the preservation of local built heritage. Internationally renowned architects are invited to compete for high-profile projects.

The *Integral* Scenario

This scenario assumes an increased demand for food, raw materials, and energy, which has progressively led to cost transparency on the global market. Against this backdrop, a general change in awareness towards more sustainability and an orientation in support of the common good is also underway in Europe. The European Union has responded by intensifying the integration and establishment of subsistent economic structures. In Austria, the state is increasingly focusing on new forms of cooperation with the private sector. In addition to large established economic units, small and medium-sized regional and grassroots structures are becoming stronger. The distribution of wealth and income tends to be more balanced, but growth is slow. Prosperity is no longer measured solely in monetary terms, but rather in terms of quality of life.

The landscape is characterized by the alternation of compact settlements and clearly defined urban agglomerations with land areas used for agriculture, forestry, and energy production. Small-scale farms with strongly traditional agricultural characteristics are contrasted with large-scale rationalized spaces on the landscape. Here, the timberline has also risen, and high-alpine glaciation is minimal. Nature preserves and protected landscapes have been expanded into networks. Climate protection and biodiversity conservation are highly valued social goals. The development of compact forms of human settlement with clearly defined perimeters characterizes the space. Different functions have been reintegrated into the settlement centers. Regions and regional partnerships have gained importance, while land consumption and soil sealing are stagnating.

Food production, energy production, and conservation and protection areas compete for the land.

To provide living space for the growing population while using land as efficiently as possible, redevelopment and infill projects have been carried out within the built fabric. These are supplemented with densely built new areas within the context of an ordered settlement process. Functional and social integration and a diversity of organizational forms are on the rise.

In the process of European integration, the regional administrative bodies that have formed beneath the federal level have quickly accumulated expertise and authority in construction, land use planning, and building culture. A new agency has been set up at the federal level that will take on tasks related to construction, planning, and building culture. The production of architecture is diverse and in the mid-market range, supplemented by professionals to support participatory processes. Design and construction contracts are mainly kept separate and awarded by means of quality-assured procedures. Cooperative and competent partnering between public authorities and the private sector benefits the quality and efficiency of the projects.

The *National* Scenario

In this scenario, a persistently unstable global political and economic situation is assumed. The European Union has split into several national alliances. Austria has left the EU in this scenario, and now increasingly focuses on national governance and control, as well as strict limits on migration of any kind. The population is decreasing slightly yet steadily. Some economic sectors are subsidized, especially agricultural production. A basic level of supply security is guaranteed by expedient bilateral economic agreements. The distribution of income and wealth remains uneven, but there are sectoral shifts, and certain population groups have become more at risk of falling into poverty. Consequently, society has increasingly been segregated by class divisions. Motorized personal transportation, suburbanization, sprawl, energy and raw materials production, and functional division characterize the landscape. Agricultural is primarily large-scale, with small-scale farming only carried out in areas that are otherwise difficult to cultivate. The timberline has risen significantly and high-alpine glaciation is minimal. Nature preserves and protected landscapes are only to fulfill the demands of tourism. Climate protection and diversity conservation measures are marginal. The declining population and an anti-urban attitude are affecting spatial development. Suburbanization and urban sprawl continue to grow outside of zones defined as high-priority for agriculture and tourism. Most city centers are shrinking, while land is increasingly used wastefully and sealed. Food production, energy production, raw material extraction, settlement development, tourism, transportation systems, and infrastructure compete for space.

The single-family home is strongly promoted as the ideal dwelling type. Thus, despite a decreasing population rate, subdivisions of single-family homes are still being built in rural areas and on the outskirts of cities. Segregation is particularly pronounced in the cities. People with a migration background live in old substandard buildings that, when in need of repair, are simply torn down and replaced with new large-scale developments. The native-born population has primary access to municipal and social housing, as well as to the higher-valued late 19th-century homes. The upper classes live in the villa districts.

Through the idealization of rural life and political efforts to preserve regional patterns and identities, federalism and subsidiarity are on the rise. Public control of planning and construction has been split across various administrative levels. The vast majority of construction projects, both public and private, are carried out by large firms acting as general contractors. The independent designer and planner scene has shrunk and is limited to a few niche markets. Small businesses, craftsmanship, and the national production of building materials are subsidized. Expertise in caring for built heritage is in demand.

Opportunities, Risks, Goals, and Strategies

To render these scenarios useful for contemporary discourse beyond the induced associations, their statements were placed in an objective context. The *Criteria for the Success of Good Building Culture*, part of the Federal Guidelines for Building Culture, were used as a basis for this objective process. The three scenarios were subjected to a comparative risk-reward analysis. However, these objective steps did not directly relate the scenarios to actual policy measures. This final link was established by a detailed review of existing policy objectives as defined by Austrian governmental programs since the year 2000. When the risk-reward analysis and the compilation of policy objectives are compared, a few notable features arise:

In terms of opportunities, an important discussion about the conservation of semi-natural spaces and affordable dwellings is seen in the policy objectives. The main opportunities in the scenarios, such as the preservation and further development of the built fabric, are only mentioned in passing in government programs. No objectives for the allocation of public space could be identified, and no concise objectives could be found for opportunities for cost transparency in the transport and energy sector or participation and cooperation.

Regarding the risks, competition for available space is particularly important. A fundamental awareness of this problem is expressed in a variety of concise formulations and evident in the policy objectives of newer government programs. At the same time, however, other objectives—such as the expansion of infrastructure, the increased use of renewable raw materials, and the production of renewable energy—indicate a persistently high degree of land consumption. The difficulty of implementing even precise policy goals against a backdrop of diverse and opposing interests becomes clear here, which signifies a steadily growing escalation of existing risks. There are also important political discussions about remote regions at risk of extinction, traffic volumes on the rise, and public authorities losing their ability to act. It was possible to find precise policy objectives addressing the risks of insufficiently integrated city and settlement planning, the effects of climate change, and standardized architectural design. The containment of urban sprawl is an explicit target in the most recent government program. Risks arising from segregation, the mobilization of vacancy, and the use of fallow land are not addressed.

Five strategic guiding principles were derived from the overview of these comparative analyses. They attempt to establish substantive interconnections and link the future to the present in order to serve as a guide to successful building culture policy in Austria and to help implement existing policy objectives.

1. Raise awareness of building culture and promote structures therefore!

Design quality results from building culture as a system of modes of action and patterns of thought. Only when the general public and the involved decision-makers both share a concept of the possibilities and problems, limits and potentials, influences and effects of building culture and their connections to other social, political, and cultural issues, can building culture advance in a positive direction. As an interdisciplinary matter, building culture is scattered throughout different departments and levels of local authority. To consolidate, stabilize, and anchor an awareness of building culture in Austria, it is vital to establish an independent agency to coordinate building culture with these central areas of activity: consulting, education, and support.

2. Strengthen the common good!

Building culture's focus on common good makes a balance possible between individual and collective interests that serve the community. In the words of the German Constitution: "With ownership comes responsibility. At the same

time, its use should serve the public good." In relation to building culture, this concept becomes more concrete when looking at access to affordable housing, the safeguarding of resources such as land, the availability of public space, and the protection of built heritage, the townscape, and the landscape—and also of comprehensive, democratic participation. In particular, the formulation and handling of building culture regulations, and most notably, the planning regulations and building code, are always subject to the public interest.

3. Plan holistically, innovatively, and to last!

A key part of building culture is the culture of planning: this directly affects the material results of building culture, i. e., built architecture and open space design, as well as subsequent processes of usage, operation, modifications, and renewal. It is therefore meaningful and necessary to further develop the future viability of these things in and through the culture of design, for example, through coordination and agreement, participation and cooperation, competence and innovation, awareness of problems and networking, and more.

4. Use land and other resources judiciously!

Good building culture exercises care and restraint with the landscape and the soil, existing buildings, energy, and raw materials. The conservation of resources through building culture takes on greater priority primarily by strengthening public interest in the practice of planning. The existing—very wide-ranging—instruments of inner urban development and vacancy management, buildable land mobilization, active land policy, and cost transparency in transportation, etc. must be employed consistently. Land use planning serves the spatial common good accordingly.

5. Link public funding to quality criteria!

In tandem with the sought-after overall competence in federal planning policy, targeted financial policy measures must be introduced in order to timely tackle urgent problems effectively—for instance, in the development of settlements and transportation systems. Taxes affecting spatial development, duties, transfer payments, and subsidies should be restructured so as to promote the goals of national policies on building culture, sustainability, and climate protection. Above all, within the framework of "spatially blind financial compensation", it is important to link federal contributions to the provinces and municipalities to the fulfillment of quantifiable and thus reviewable quality criteria.