



20 May 2026

City Conference

Politics on a tight budget

Achieving a lot with limited funds

How can cities remain liveable, socially just and climate-resilient despite tight budgets? This was the question addressed at the AK City Conference 'Politics on a Tight Budget – Achieving a Lot with Little Money', held in Vienna on 20 May 2026. Representatives from academia, public administration, urban planning and interest groups discussed new approaches to local politics and cost-effective measures for the city of the future with the participants.

The conference focused on concrete examples of how cities can achieve improvements through relatively simple and cost-effective measures. To kick things off, Thomas Ritt outlined the challenges facing growing cities under budgetary pressure. In his keynote speech, Stavros Stavrides emphasised the particular importance of urban commons, which can open up new avenues for self-governance and solidarity, especially in times of crisis.

Christian Iaione, Eckhard Hasler and Francesca Galimberti then used international examples from cities such as Rome, Berlin and Milan to demonstrate how municipal innovations can make an impact even with limited resources: for instance, through traffic calming measures, flexible cycling solutions or greater resident involvement.

To conclude, the conference turned its attention back to Vienna. Sabrina Halkic provided insights into the importance of tactical urbanism for the cost-effective and innovative design of the city, involving residents. In a round-table discussion, Sabrina Halkic, Gabu Heindl, Gunnar Grandel, Agnes Wyskitensky and Ilkim Erdost then discussed new forms of urban design, the equitable distribution of public funds and the importance of high-quality local participation.

From the AK's perspective, one thing is clear: in the long term, public budgets must be strengthened again through appropriate redistributive measures. At the same time, particularly in financially difficult times, political leadership and creative solutions are needed to safeguard quality of life and social inclusion.

That is why the AK calls for:

- 1. Making better use of what is already there.** Parks, streets – particularly residential streets – and open spaces must be better utilised as meeting places. This can also be done on a temporary basis, for example, sometimes as a street, sometimes for a neighbourhood festival. Heat hotspots can be made more climate-resilient through planting or temporary shading.
- 2. Ensure public transport and a climate-resilient environment.** A climate-resilient city needs public transport. Its expansion must be guaranteed. Streets and squares must become climate-resilient, with plenty of greenery, more unsealed surfaces, and consumption-free spaces and seating areas.
- 3. Involving the public.** Participation in the neighbourhood, the borough and the city must be free from language barriers and easily accessible to all. To this end, opportunities for participation must be systematically expanded and lead to binding outcomes. Participation in city affairs must be socially balanced.