



Village renewal in Tyrol through integrated strategic approaches to rural housing and heritage

SUMMARY

The Tyrolean Integrated Village Renewal programme promotes sustainable rural development through various instruments in the areas of housing conversion, heritage preservation and community engagement. The initiative prioritises revitalising village centres instead of expanding outwards, balancing modern housing needs with conservation of cultural heritage.

Financial support is provided for repurposing vacant buildings into functional housing while maintaining architectural identity. Through neighbourhood development plans, experts and users are involved in developing holistic village strategies.



Themes: Housing, spatial planning, cultural heritage, Rural revitalisation

Country: Austria

Organisations:

> Government of Tyrol, public authority

Start & end date: 1985 - ongoing

Funding sources:

> Multi-annual EU regional funding

> Regional public funding (Government of Tyrol)

> Local Agenda 21 instruments

> Municipal co-financing and private contributions

Website: www.tirol.gv.at/dorferneuerung

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CONTEXT

Tyrol is a mountainous federal state in western Austria with many small municipalities and villages. Only around 12% of the territory is usable for permanent settlement, which increases pressure on land and housing and makes reuse of existing buildings particularly important.

At the same time, village centres often have vacant or underused traditional buildings, while pressure from tourism and second homes can reduce housing availability for permanent residents in some areas.

Tyrol's approach combines technical and financial support with participatory processes to strengthen village centres and adapt existing buildings for contemporary needs.



OBJECTIVES

- > Revitalise village centres by repurposing vacant and underused historic buildings into functional housing, rather than expanding new building zones outwards;
- > Balance modern housing needs with conservation of cultural heritage and the architectural identity of Tyrolean villages;
- > Use participatory processes (Local Agenda 21) to build local ownership and implementation capacity;
- > Engage municipalities, residents and experts in holistic, community-led village development that integrates environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects.



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Government of Tyrol delivers village renewal through a long-running **programme that combines technical support, funding and community processes**. It supports villages through an integrated set of programme components. This includes:

- > **Repurposing vacant buildings for housing:** financial support is provided for municipalities and private owners to transform vacant or underused historic properties into functional homes, with priority for young people and families who want to stay in or return to rural areas, while maintaining the architectural identity of the village;
- > **Neighbourhood development plans:** interdisciplinary expert teams (e.g. experts on architecture, spatial planning and mobility) work together with users and residents to develop holistic strategies for village centres and their public spaces;
- > **Community-led planning through Local Agenda 21:** this participatory instrument involves citizens directly in village renewal processes and local sustainability projects. It supports municipalities in organising structured dialogues, agreeing priorities and developing projects with local stakeholders, so that renewal is not only a technical exercise but also a shared local process.



RESULTS

- > Vacant and underused, often historic, **buildings are repurposed for housing**, while their architectural identity is preserved.
- > **Village centres are revitalised**, rather than expanded outwards, helping to maintain vibrant rural communities while safeguarding local identity.
- > Modern **housing needs are balanced with cultural heritage conservation**, making housing more accessible and attractive without sacrificing the character of Tyrolean villages.
- > Through neighbourhood development plans, **experts and users work together on holistic village strategies** that reflect local needs and conditions.
- > Community-led planning secures **local participation in shaping village renewal efforts**.
- > The European Village Renewal Prize has honoured several Tyrolean villages, including Fließ (winner, 2016), Steinberg am Rofan (silver, 2022) and Oberhofen 'Rimml Areal' (gold, 2024), **recognising village centre renewal efforts and reuse of existing buildings** for community purposes.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Build inwards, not outwards:** prioritising the revitalisation of village centres over expansion into new building zones protects land, strengthens the centres' social fabric and keeps services close to residents.
- > **Pair financial support with planning expertise:** grants alone do not deliver good outcomes in heritage settings; combining funding with expert advice of multidisciplinary teams and the participation of residents ensures that renovated buildings work as modern homes while respecting local architectural identity.
- > **Engage residents as co-designers:** community-led planning through Local Agenda 21 shows that participation works best when residents help shape their own village renewal, not just consult on finished plans.
- > **Integrate housing, heritage and community:** treating housing conversion, heritage preservation and community engagement as one strategy, rather than separate workstreams, makes village renewal both more durable and more meaningful to residents.
- > **Replicable, but anchored in regional commitment:** the programme is transferable to other regions facing similar housing and heritage pressures, but it depends on sustained political commitment and a regional framework that gives municipalities both funding and support to act.



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