



“HOUSE OF FUTURE”

An Action Plan for Graz

03.05.2026





Content

1. Introduction.....	2
1.1 What is planned?	2
1.2 Background	3
1.3 Aim of the Action Plan	4
2. Status quo analysis	6
2.1 Existing resources.....	6
2.2 Needs Analysis	11
3. Strategy and actions	13
3.1 Mission and Vision.....	13
3.2 Strategy and actions.....	13
3.3 Monitoring.....	14
3.4 Risk Management.....	15
3.5 Long-term sustainability	16



WHAT FOR?

The "House of the Future" creates space for new, positive models of coexistence and social and economic activity and encourages change.

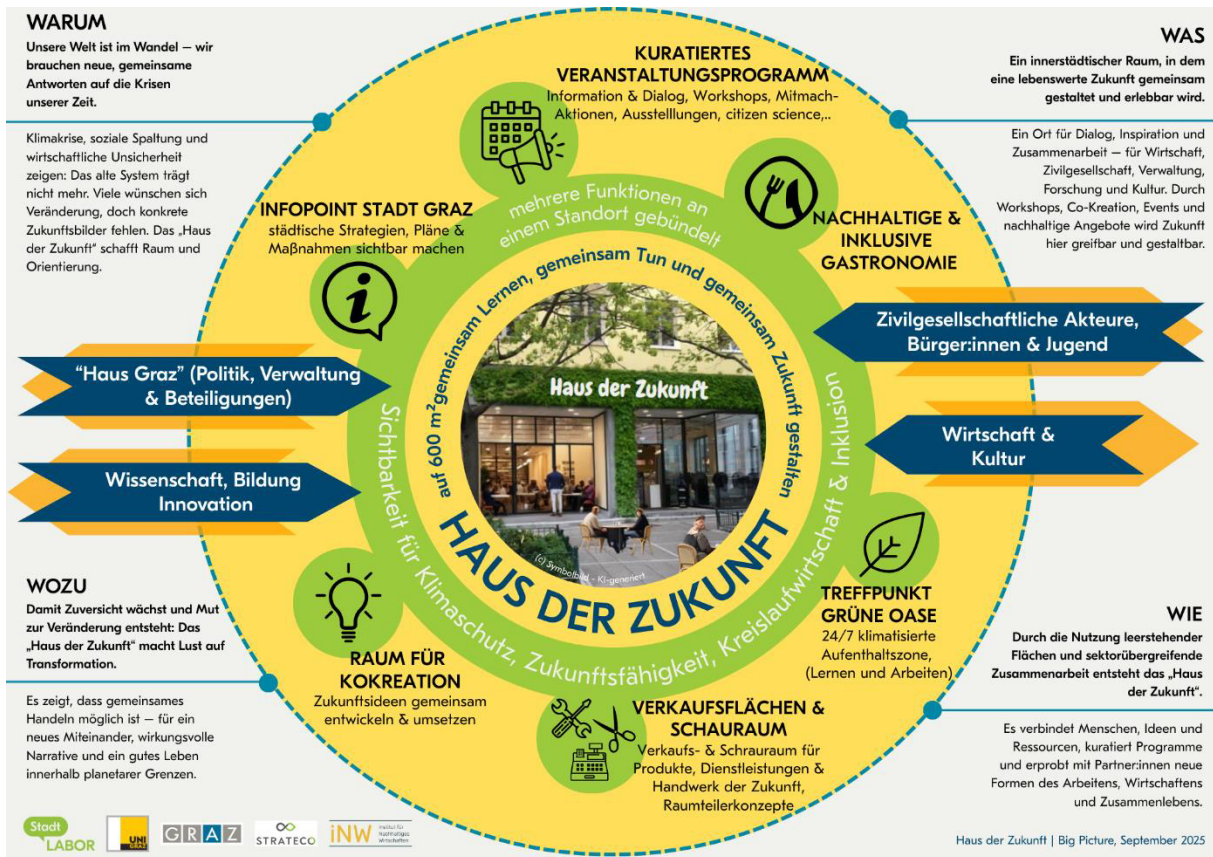


Abbildung 1: Big Picture of the „House of Future“, (c) StadtLABOR

1.2 Background

Graz has a large number of local entrepreneurs and people looking for space, especially in the areas of circular economy and sustainability. On the other hand, there are many vacant properties in the city center, which are either unaffordable or unsuitable for these small businesses due to high rents or spaces that are too large to be used on their own.

At the same time, StadtLABOR developed the idea of a “House of Future”. The idea is to offer sustainable consumption models and products, organize events and exhibitions, provide information points for the city of Graz, and offer sustainable catering. It aims to create a place



for cooperation and co-creation for a climate-friendly, just, and liveable future. This vision grew out of a “sustainable department store” that was part of the NiCE project.

The pilot project at „Herrengasse 10“ was implemented between June and September 2024 and intended to serve as a building block for the “House of Future”. It aimed to temporarily revitalize a vacant inner-city property while giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to showcase their products and experiment with new business ideas. Sixteen businesses were selected through a call for applications, all of which shared a focus on regionality, sustainability, and art. Each entrepreneur took turns using the space in a purely self-organized manner, creating a dynamic and ever-changing showcase of local creativity. The city of Graz provided a small space in the middle of the old town where producers could present their products and crafts.

The basis and structure for all three action plans was provided by a model action plan from UBA, which was further developed in collaboration with all partners during partner meetings and on the exchange platform. All project partners were involved in identifying potential cities, which led to the prioritised development of the plans in three selected cities.

All project partners were actively involved in the joint development of the three local action plans. The lead partners were Brzeg Dolny, UBA and StadtLABOR Graz. At the partner meeting in Brzeg Dolny (October 2025), the plans were collaboratively developed in groups on site, incorporating findings from the NiCE pilot projects and tandem cooperation.

1.3 Aim of the Action Plan

The aim of this plan is to foster the implementation of a multi-dimensional and multi-purpose „House of Future” beyond the NiCE Project. It is to compile the vision and mission for the „House of Future” with two of the main strategies of the City of Graz as the „Economic Strategy 2030” and the „Climate Protection Plan 2040” that strives for a climate neutral city in 2040.

This is intended to ensure that a sustainable and tangible strategy is developed and implemented together with the City of Graz.

This action plan also takes into account that there is a close link to the University of Graz that strives to set up a transdisciplinary living lab: Climate and sustainability research requires dialogue and collaboration with businesses, policymakers and civil society in order to develop effective solutions. In education, there is a growing need for formats in which students can tackle real-world problems alongside these stakeholders and develop problem-solving skills.



Existing initiatives (e.g. IPs, Sustainability Challenge) are only partially sufficient for this purpose, which is why there is a need for longer-term platforms and venues to institutionalise such transdisciplinary formats. Living Labs or real-world laboratories, operated by universities in collaboration with their local communities, have proven to be a suitable research and teaching infrastructure for these requirements.

What is the current status of the project?

After implementation of the pop-up store in 2024, further networking took place to drive forward the „House of Future”. A first core team with four members had already been established at that time that strove for opening the process to involve more stakeholders.

„Future Breakfast”

There was a public invitation for the „Future Breakfast” in October 2024 to take a further step towards opening up the process and find like-minded contributors and designers to help plan and implement the ‘House of Future’, which is to be supported as a joint project by numerous stakeholders from politics, public administration, business, academia and civil society. In addition to the context-based work, interest was expressed in thematic working groups in collaborating on and helping to shape the planning and implementation of the „House of Future”. Key areas of focus were the content strategy, the business model (funding and support), identifying potential users (department stores, restaurants, events, etc.), finding suitable premises, and additional support.

„Vision & Mission Workshop”

In December 2024 an intensive interdisciplinary workshop with participants from the core team, the City of Graz, science, business, social organisations and the creative sector focused on the vision and mission of the „House of Future”. Key topics comprised „Needs”, „Work” and „Results”.

Vacant spaces and networking with property owners

There have been vacancy surveys in the year 2023 and 2024 that documented more than 90 vacant shop spaces at ground floor in a defined area in the city center. This area stretched from the main station along Annenstraße and through the old town to Jakominiplatz. These properties varied greatly in dimension and condition, however about 20 spaces seemed to be suitable to implement the pop-up store. Great effort was put in contacting the owners and presenting the concept of „NiCE”.



At the end of the pilot project and when the concept of a „House of Future” was on the table, bigger shop spaces (up to 1000 sqm) needed to be taken into account for the „House of Future”. Therefore in 2024 and 2025 intense contact was build up to several property owners. Talks were held with the owners of e.g.

- „Kastner & Öhler Home” department store
- „Spitzhaus” and others (Insurance Company „Generali”)
- several spaces in Graz (owned by „Sparkasse” Bank)
- several spaces in Graz (owned by „Merkur” Insurance Company)

In summer of 2025 promising negotiations were going on with Raiffeisen-Landesbank Styria which owns a centrally located place suitable for the „House of Future” at Tummelplatz in the heart of the city. The bank’s executive board was very much interested in implementing the concept. In the end, however, it wasn’t possible to open the ‘House of the Future’ at that location.

In early 2026, a property developer from Graz acquired a former furniture store on Annenstraße, which is one of the proposed locations for the ‘House of Future’. The previous owner had gone into administration, and the premises had stood empty for about a year. Now there is an opportunity to test the „House of Future” in this building in close collaboration with the new owners.

Core Team

In 2024 a core team was founded including four partners: StadtLABOR GmbH, University of Graz, Strateco OG and Institute for Sustainable Business. Since the end of 2025 new partners came to the core group as the City of Graz (Department of Economic and Tourism Development, also associated partner in the NiCE project) and the oikos group. The team meets every four to six weeks for an intensive planning session. Work is currently underway on a needs assessment for businesses; roles are being clarified; the business plan is being refined and expanded; and a suitable legal structure is being sought. The preference is for a cooperative.

2. STATUS QUO ANALYSIS

2.1 Existing resources

The insights gained from the NiCE pilot project ‘Herrengasse 10’, as well as from the tandem with the Kosice pilot and other pilot projects, are extremely valuable resources. The four



practical guidelines from the Solution Box, which were developed as part of the NiCE project, also provide significant support in the process of implementing the ‘House of the Future’.

To which strategy of the city does the idea align?

There are several content-related links between the concept of the „House of Future”, the „Graz Economic Strategie 2030” and „Graz Climate Protection Plan 2040”:

„House of Future“

The "House of the Future" is an open, central space of possibilities in the centre of Graz, where climate protection, sustainable management, social interaction and shaping the future are considered together. It aims to transform vacant spaces into lively rooms for dialogue, experimentation and cooperation. Easily accessible information and awareness raising on sustainability and climate protection, experimental testing of new ways of living and economic models as well as innovative services and sustainable consumption options invite citizens, companies, universities, municipality to connect and get active. The goal is a collective shift towards a sustainable, climate-friendly way of life.

„Graz Economic Strategie 2030”

This strategy focuses on sustainable, climate-friendly economic and social activity. Its central guiding principle is the promotion of competitive, climate-neutral, sustainable, just and inclusive economic activity, which is to be used as an important competitive advantage. To develop innovations and establish Graz as a hub for sustainable solutions, the strategy relies on close cooperation between the city, science, business, and society. At the same time, it aims to strengthen Graz’s position as a business location in international comparison, particularly in the areas of green transformation and innovation, with the high quality of life explicitly understood as an important locational factor. The strategy is explicitly aligned with the climate protection plan and the city’s mission statement and is also based on key EU strategies such as the Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

„Graz Climate Protection Plan 2040”

The Graz Climate Protection Plan – Climate Neutrality by 2040 – defines ambitious targets for the city’s future. Its main goal is to achieve climate neutrality for Graz by 2040 by reducing emissions, promoting renewable energy, expanding sustainable



mobility, fostering innovation in the urban context, and strengthening citizen participation. In addition, the plan aims for climate neutrality of the “Haus Graz” – the city administration and municipal companies – as early as 2030. A detailed action plan with more than 400 measures on emission reduction and efficiency improvements demonstrates how CO₂ emissions can be significantly lowered. The plan is designed as a participatory process and integrates the administration, society, and the business community alike. What has been done so far?

Shared Goals & Synergies:

Focus on Sustainability & Climate Protection: All three initiatives highlight climate protection as a central challenge. They aim for climate-friendly transformation processes in society, economy, and administration. The "House of the Future" makes climate protection tangible and part of every day life, the Economic Strategy anchors climate-neutral economic policy, and the Climate Protection Plan operationalizes concrete measures.

Cooperation and Networking:

City administration, science, businesses, civil society, and citizens collaborate on equal terms toward common goals. The Economic Strategy emphasizes the importance of cooperation between stakeholders and the city. The "House of the Future" provides a physical and social space for this purpose.

Innovation & Future Visions:

The Economic Strategy positions Graz as an innovation hub. The "House of the Future" brings together ideas and solutions. The Climate Protection Plan includes innovative measures for energy efficiency, mobility, and urban development. In this way, the city aims to serve as a model for a sustainable, creative, and resilient city of the future.

Quality of Life & Social Cohesion:

Beyond ecological goals, all three concepts and strategies emphasize high quality of life, inclusion and participation, as well as social innovations and new forms of work. Not only technical solutions but also societal design capabilities take center stage.

Conclusion:

The "House of the Future" can be read as an inclusive, participatory showcase of the municipal strategies. It brings together the visions of the Economic Strategy (sustainable,



climate-friendly economic activity) and the goals of the Climate Protection Plan (climate neutrality, emission reduction). While the Economic Strategy sets structural guidelines and economic objectives, and the Climate Protection Plan describes concrete measures for CO₂ reduction, the "House of the Future" creates a low-threshold, creative space for exchange and co-design that networks and motivates people, companies, and initiatives to actively contribute to this future.

Who is involved? Who supports?

Departments and institutions of the City of Graz

Vital and essential support is given by the Department of Economic and Tourism Development of the City of Graz. The Department is an associated partner in the NiCE project and has been involved in all activities setting up the project's pilot. It offered the space which finally hosted the pop-up store „Herrengasse 10“. It participated in networking meetings and workshops and fosters further steps towards the implementation of the „House of Future“.

The Department of Economic and Tourism Development has become member of the core team and is to a great extent involved in developing content by contributing ideas, helping shaping the process and „opening doors“.

The new city manager in Graz is also very much interested in implementing the „House of Future“. As an expert in urban and location development her role is to provide key impetus for the further development of Graz city centre.

Currently „Ökoprofit“ is closely connected with the concept of the „House of Future“ as it acts as partner at the University's Sustainability Challenge. The ÖKOPROFIT environmental program was developed in 1991 by the Graz Environmental Agency in collaboration with Graz University of Technology. It is a collaborative project between the regional business community, the public administration and experts (a public-private partnership) and offers businesses an environmental management approach that focuses on raising awareness, practical relevance and the implementation of measures.

As a local actor in Annenstraße, where the former „Leiner“ furniture store is situated, the „Gesundheitsdrehseibe“ („health hub“ run by the City of Graz) is also very much interested in a collaboration with the „House of Future“ and could add great social and health related content and expertise.



Core team

Starting in summer 2024 partners in the core team „StadtLABOR GmbH“, „Strateco OG“, „Institute for Sustainable Business“ and the „University of Graz“ cooperate strongly to put the concept into practice.

University of Graz

The university's contribution is very much supported by the Vice-Chancellor and the Head of the Resources Department, both of whom are keen to collaborate with the „House of Future“. Their aim is to integrate a living lab . They are committed to provide substantial resources for this purpose, so could they bring in budget for a proportion of the rental costs.

Policy makers

Several policy makers in Graz from different political backgrounds have been interested in the concept of the „House of Future“. Two city councillors and the deputy mayor are willing to provide support and intend to continue pursuing the project. However the city's current financial situation does not allow for any other form of support.

Which vacant spaces in Graz offer opportunities?

Today there are around 20 vacant properties on Annenstraße, which students from the University of Graz working on the „Sustainability Challenge“ systematically record (number of owners, owners' places of residence, etc.). The students invite owners to viewings (e.g. on 26 February), and they will be viewing these properties one by one.

One of these properties is the former 21.000 sqm large „Leiner“ furniture store. It has been vacant since the beginning of 2025 but shortly the store has been sold and its new owner, a property developer from Graz, is open to innovative ideas and interim use. Currently the core team of the „House of Future“ is in close contact with them exchanging ideas for opening up the building in a phase of interim use. This could be a precious opportunity to test the „House of Future“ with first activities beginning at the second quarter of 2026.



Abbildung 2: former „Leiner“ furniture store in Annenstraße, (c) Holger Hoff

2.2 Needs Analysis

Needs analyses relating to the „House of Future“ cover a wide range of target groups. During the concept development phase, various target groups and their needs were analysed in different contexts.

Those involved in the circular economy face particular challenges when it comes to finding suitable and affordable spaces. Many players are currently still operating in isolation, which makes them less visible to customers, potential partners and owners of vacant properties alike. It would be particularly helpful for these small-scale, often innovative initiatives to join forces, present a united front and approach owners of unused spaces together.

Affordable premises are a key challenge: high rents, short lease terms and uncertainty make it difficult to establish new, sustainable business models. At the same time, these companies need support in establishing and professionalising their innovative, circular business models – for example, through consultancy, networking or shared infrastructure. If they were to share resources – storage space, workshops, machinery, event venues, but also knowledge and networks – costs could be reduced and synergies enhanced.

Added to this is the work on the image of sustainability: circular economy stakeholders must be and remain credible, communicate transparently and demonstrate that their offerings are both ecologically and economically viable. A shared space or platform where multiple players are visible at the same time can help build trust, signal professionalism and anchor the topic of the circular economy more firmly within the city.



Workshops as the „Future Breakfast“ and the „Vision & Mission Workshop“ identified further needs for society as a whole:

- Develop new, resource-efficient, positive and sustainable narratives and practices.
- Create spaces and formats for dialogue, active listening and a focus on what unites us rather than what divides us.
- View climate action as a collective responsibility and work together to secure and shape our future.

The workshops focused additionally on broader target groups and their needs as citizens and consumers. These have been pointed out:

- A need for a sense of belonging, participation and social inclusion among a wide range of groups (children, young people, unemployed, migrants, etc.).
- A need for low-threshold, practical support services in everyday life (repairs, advice, dealing with official bodies, training for green jobs).
- The need for guidance and knowledge regarding sustainable lifestyles, climate protection and new forms of economic activity.
- The need for exchange, cooperation and community – in other words, developing projects, learning, working and expressing oneself culturally together.
- The need for consumption-free, safe and attractive places to spend time in the city that promote quality of life, creativity and engagement.

Currently a survey for companies is being prepared by the core team of the „House of Future“. It aims to highlight the specific offerings, services and framework conditions that will make the „House of Future“ truly attractive to businesses. It also identifies which sectors and business models are interested, what space, lease terms, rents and infrastructure they require, and which forms of collaboration (e.g. shared use of spaces, events, test areas) make sense. At the same time, it helps to understand what obstacles exist (costs, uncertainty, lack of visibility) and how the House of the Future must be designed so that companies actually become active within it – rather than merely being considered as an abstract target group.



3. STRATEGY AND ACTIONS

3.1 Mission and Vision

The „House of Future“ creates inspiring spaces for interaction and co-creation, where people can work together enthusiastically to develop and test solutions for a positive, circular and sustainable society. It offers sharing of resources, curated events, spaces for pioneering companies, and venues for dialogue, networking, collaborative activities and consumption-free interaction, thereby becoming a space where we shape the future together.

The „House of Future“ is a vibrant hub in Graz, where the future is created as a living, communal and joyful transformation. It brings together social interaction, climate protection and innovation, making what lies ahead tangible and experiential, and serves as a catalyst for a liveable, people-centred climate city – acting as a bridge to a future that we are already anticipating and building together with enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility.

3.2 Strategy and actions

The following strategies and objectives are to be implemented step by step over the coming weeks and months in collaboration with existing and new partners:

Strategy 1: Using interim use as a launch and trial phase

Utilising available vacant properties for temporary interim use (this option is emerging for the ‘Leiner’ building) to test the concept, connect stakeholders, establish initial business areas and gain experience before long-term operations begin.

The activities described in this action plan are based on our pilot experience with the pop-up store and on the Solution Guide “Methodology Kit on stakeholders’ engagement in circular lifestyles“. For the further development of the “House of Future” and the implementation of the activities described here, we will continue to draw on the guidelines contained in the Solution Guide mentioned above as well as on “How to build, run and sustain a multifunctional resource centre“.

Strategy 2: Establish a sustainable financial structure

Developing a stable financing structure comprising public grants and donations (in the beginning, for the long term dependency on public funding and donations shall be reduced), income from rent, services, partnerships, memberships and complementary social enterprises and, where appropriate, crowdlending or equity models for covering



main operating and personnel costs. The aim is to achieve structural self-sufficiency in order to ensure affordability and long-term viability.

Strategy 3: Develop a suitable operating model and legal structure

Establishment of a clear operational model with a clear division of responsibilities between the city, associations, businesses and civil society, as well as the selection of an appropriate legal form (e.g. an association, a cooperative, a non-profit organisation) that enshrines openness, participation and sustainability.

Strategy 4: Select and secure an attractive location

Careful selection of a site in a central, easily accessible location, of sufficient size, with clear tenancy terms and long-term prospects, in order to realise the vision of an inclusive, vibrant and accessible community.

Strategy 5: Gradually move into full operation

A phased approach to setting up the business, depending on the business model: starting with smaller-scale formats (workshops, repair cafés, pop-up shops), and gradually expanding through partnerships, pioneering companies and fixed-use services to minimise risks and test viability. Valuable information and guidance from the NICE Solution Box – for example, on engaging stakeholders, running a multifunctional resource centre and linking it to e-commerce – should be taken on board.

3.3 Monitoring

As the “House of Future” is installed, the measures put in place will be subject to evaluation and monitoring. The purpose of monitoring is to assess whether the set targets have been met and if any adjustments are needed in one or more areas. Furthermore, monitoring is essential to demonstrate progress

- to measure impacts (environmental, social, economic)
- to facilitate learning and adaptation
- to ensure transparency for the public and stakeholders
- to provide inspiration



The monitoring process is designed to cover several dimensions and takes into account ecological, economic, social and structural impacts. Qualitative and quantitative indicators are assessed through regular surveys.

Quantitative indicators will include:

- Monthly visitors
- Number of events/workshops
- Number of shops and service providers
- CO₂ savings (estimated – through recycling, materials, energy savings, mobility)
- Number of participating organisations
- Sales figures for sustainable products (changed consumer behaviour)
- New partnerships and business models, projects initiated

Qualitative indicators will include:

- Knowledge building and raising awareness
- User and stakeholder satisfaction
- Perceived inspiration and hope
- Quality of collaboration
- Level of innovation in the projects

A combination of methods will be used to collect the data. This includes surveys (online and paper-based), observation, interviews and digital data collection (e.g. visitor numbers, turnover figures).

3.4 Risk Management

The risk management framework for the 'House of the Future' adopts an integrated, sustainability-focused approach that takes into account environmental, social, economic and organisational risks. Leitprinzipien sind:

- Proactive rather than reactive
- Systemic (considering space, people and use together)
- Participatory (involving stakeholders)
- Adaptive (continuous learning)

The risks are categorised into five key areas:

- Environmental risks (e.g. allegations of 'greenwashing')
- Social risks (e.g. low public acceptance, conflicts)



- Economic risks (e.g. uncertain funding, low revenue)
- Operational & organisational risks (unclear responsibilities, inefficient land use)
- Innovation & transformation risks (lack of impact on behaviour)

Risk management at the “House of Future” is designed as a continuous, iterative process. It begins with risk identification through stakeholder workshops and scenario analyses. The risks are then assessed and prioritised using a risk matrix based on probability of occurrence and impact, in order to direct resources specifically towards critical areas.

Risk management is achieved through three strategies: avoidance through clear planning, reduction – for example through pilot projects – and deliberate acceptance through flexible usage concepts. Combining these strategies strengthens the project’s long-term resilience.

A key element is continuous monitoring, reviews and early warning indicators.

Clear governance structures with defined roles, as well as transparent communication, are key factors for success. Overall, the ‘House of Future’ is conceived as a resilient system that does not avoid all risks, but deals with uncertainties in a flexible and robust manner, thereby enabling innovation and sustainable impact.

3.5 Long-term sustainability

The „House of Future“ is intended to be run in the long term as an independent, sustainable meeting place and hub for innovation that goes along with two main strategies of the City of Graz - the „Economic Strategy 2030” and the „Climate Protection Plan 2040”. To this end, a business plan is to be developed together with all partners that ensures the building is financially self-sustaining on the long run and relies not at all or as little as possible on ongoing funding. The aim is to achieve structural self-sufficiency, whereby income from rent, services, partnerships, memberships and complementary social enterprises covers main operating and personnel costs.

As the „House of Future“ moves towards independence, the City of Graz and the University of Graz are key partners, particularly in the first years of operation.