



*Shaping
the future
together*

The Vienna Charta

The Vienna Charter: Shaping the future together.

Large cities are diverse and heterogeneous, and diversity increases with internationalisation. Therefore, it is crucial that everyone living in a city be able to deal with this diversity calmly, objectively, and without fear, but also with a critical and open mind. This is indispensable for us to feel comfortable and increases the individual quality of life. It is just as important for social cohesion and solidarity.

It is against this backdrop that the City of Vienna launched the Vienna Charter project, an initiative that is unique in Europe. At the same time, the city defined its role as that of an initiator and enabler of a process rather than its sole manager, seeking and finding - a completely new way of establishing a partnership with civil society.

1 Objectives and core elements

In a press conference to announce the launch of the project on 13 March 2012, Mayor Michael Häupl, Deputy Mayor Maria Vassilakou, and Executive City Councillor Sandra Frauenberger described the objectives of this project:

“The Viennese are right to be proud of the high quality of living in our city. Social cohesion and a climate of respect are particularly important at a time when we all face new challenges. It is therefore crucial how we interact with each other in everyday life. Good neighbourly relations cannot be enacted by law. The people who live in Vienna need to come to an understanding and formulate mutually acceptable solutions. The Vienna Charter provides the framework for good neighbourly relations, actively promotes the dialogue between the citizens and builds solidarity. (...) The Vienna Charter aims to set the course for a good and respectful climate in our city in cooperation with all our citizens.”

These words clearly reflect the core elements and goals of the initiative:

- Living together as a community cannot—and should not—be regulated by law alone. In fact, the things that have a strong impact on the social climate, such as respect, consideration for others, or the willingness to help others, cannot be legislated. The Charter should not be a decree from above; it should not be a new set of rules with sanctions for those who do not comply with them.
- People of all ages and with different outlooks on life, ethnic backgrounds, professions, and opinions should come together to discuss and develop the Vienna Charter together. Controversial discussions were welcome, because the Charter is based on diversity of opinion. It is about all districts, about entrepreneurs, blue and white collar workers, and non-working persons, about children and senior citizens, persons with special needs, people who were born in Vienna and who moved to the city later in life, persons with different religious beliefs and worldviews—briefly: It is about all of us because good neighbourly relations are vital for us all.
- The special thing about this project was that the Viennese themselves chose the topics and participated actively to the development of the Charter in discussions. The Vienna Charter is an agreement between people who live in this city, an agreement they have arrived at mutually and
- out of their own conviction. The changes that it can work on life in Vienna will depend on the degree to which people voluntarily decide to follow it and agree

on it with others. Therefore, the core element in developing the Charter were a wide range of communication and sometimes controversial discussion processes.

- Nothing was prescribed from above—that City of Vienna merely facilitated the process.
- Shaping the future: The aim of the process was to agree on common ground rules for the future of our city. In the Charter process, the people of Vienna could express their views on how good neighbourly relations should work from now on and what they would do to contribute to that. It was not about things politicians or the city administration should do, but rather about what every individual can do to improve the way we live together in our city.



Mayor Michael Häupl, Vice-Mayor Maria Vassilakou and Executive City Councillor Sandra Frauenberger

Foto by Alexandra Kromus / PID

2 Concept and preparation

In November 2010, Municipal Department 17 - Integration and Diversity was given the task to develop and implement the concept for this project.

Online and offline

The concept was developed in the course of 2011. It was soon decided that people should be able to participate both online and offline. The external agency neu&kühn was contracted for the online implementation. They were involved in the concept development and its technical implementation, and moderated the forum during the online phases.

People without Internet access could phone their suggestions in. The true centrepiece of the Charter process were the Charter talks, where people met to discuss issues face-to-face. The results of these talks were placed online in a completely transparent manner, so that both the participants and the general public could see them.

Two questions were discussed intently during the preparation. The first one was the duration of the process. Media and communication experts recommended a short and intense process of no more than a few months or even just a few weeks. They argued that the attention of the public and the media could not be maintained for any longer. Potential partner organisations who work directly with people and had experience with group processes, on the other hand, considered it necessary for the group phase to last at least one year. Finally, a good compromise was found in an eight-month process.

The second question was how to structure the topics under discussion, i.e., which aspects of living together in a city to address. One suggestion was to choose topics based on experience and/or surveys. This idea was discarded, as any pre-selection of topics would have run counter to the idea that it should be the people of Vienna who determined the content of the Charter. Therefore, it was decided to introduce an initial online phase during which everyone could suggest topics.

The following timeline was developed:

- Presentation of the project and press conference: 12 March 2012
- Topic collection: 19 March to 1 April 2012
- Presentation of topics by the advisory committee: 13 April 2012
- Charter talks: 13 April to 14 October 2012:
- Second online phase: 28 September to 14 October 2012:
- Presentation of the Vienna Charter: 27 November 2012



The core document

An open process such as this one, where the people of Vienna would determine the contents of the Charter, requires fundamental principles and clear rules: in a democratic constitutional state there are some things that are not open for discussion.

The core document was, therefore, based on a number of fundamental and inalienable core elements of international legal norms and the Austrian Constitution. It was developed by a group of experts between May and September 2011. This group consisted of legal experts as well as experts of everyday life (residential building caretaker, school student, school principal).

The core document consists of three parts: democracy and the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, women's and children's rights. From the beginning of the process, the importance of this document was highlighted on the website: "The development process of the Vienna Charter is based on these core elements, which are its starting point and foundation. They cannot and shall not be called into question by anyone."

Advisory committee

Transparency, openness, and credibility are the key principles of the Vienna Charter project. An independent advisory committee was established to safeguard these principles and to ensure that the opinions and wishes of the Viennese, and nothing else, would be reflected in all the phases of the process. The members of the advisory committee reflected the wide range of partner organisations, they came from different professional backgrounds (businesspeople, social services, youth workers, journalists, caretakers, shop stewards, etc.) and they all had professional and life experience concerning situations where people from different parts of society interact. The committee consisted of three women and three men, both old and young, and two of them had been born in a country other than Austria. The advisory committee safeguarded the basic principles established and communicated clearly at the beginning of the processes and acted as an arbitration panel to resolve disputes.

Partner organisations

A process as broad as this one, which sought to involve all parts of Viennese society, cannot and should not be organised by political decision-makers and the city administration alone. Therefore, we chose a new, innovative approach: All organisations in the city (businesses, clubs and associations, employer associations, trade unions, religious communities, political parties, etc.) were invited to become partners of the Vienna Charter. An invitation letter from the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor was sent out to all cooperation partners of the different Administrative Groups of the Vienna City Administration. It was expressed as an open invitation to anyone interested in participating, and was also publicised on the homepage and in interviews to reach a wide range of people.

325 partner organisations from an impressively diverse range of fields declared their intent of supporting the process actively by holding Charter talks and/or using their information channels to spread awareness of the project. This included large companies (such as Siemens, McDonald's, IBM), both sides of industry (Austrian

Chamber of Labour, Austrian Economic Chamber, trade unions), various cultural and sports associations and clubs, migrants' organisations, communities of faith (the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, the Islamic Community of Austria, the Jewish Community, the Buddhist Community) and the Freethinkers Association, three of the four political parties represented in the Vienna City Council (Social Democrats, People's Party, the Greens) and the district organisation Margareten of the Communist Party, self-help groups of people with special needs, and the Homosexuals' Initiative. These are just a few examples to illustrate the wide range of partner organisations.

A list of all partner organisations is available online at <https://charta.wien.gv.at/start/charta/partnerorganisationen/liste/>.



3 The phases of the Charter process

3.1 Collecting the topics—19 March to 1 April 2012

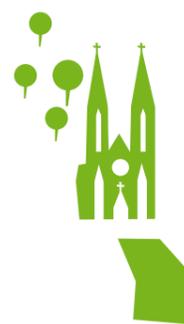
In the initial two-week phase, all Viennese could suggest topics they considered important for good neighbourly relations either online or by phone. The online forum was moderated 24/7 by the external partner neu&kühn, and the "Charter hotline" was staffed Monday to Friday by up to 6 employees of Municipal Department 17. The hotline staff posted the suggestions received online.

Public events were held at Museumsquartier, at Yppenplatz/Brunnenmarkt, in a youth centre, and in a retirement home, where anyone who was interested could suggest topics. Project team members with laptops posted these suggestions online.

The following ground rules were stated clearly on the homepage from the beginning:

- The core document describes the indispensable foundations of good neighbourly relations arising from legal norms. Comments that question these foundations will not be published.
- Forum moderators ensure that all users respect the rules of netiquette.
- The topic of the Vienna Charter is how the Viennese want to shape their neighbourly relations in Vienna. Comments on other topics will not be published.
- The Vienna Charter is not the place for requests or suggestions directed at political decision-makers or the city administration. Should such comments be posted (e.g., requests for changes to legislation or for more park benches), they will be forwarded to the competent departments.
- In total, there were 2,649 comments, of which 1,848 topic suggestions were published. 765 postings were not published. The majority of these contained requests addressed to the political administrative levels and were forwarded to the competent departments. 36 comments were positive or negative feedback concerning the Vienna Charter in general. The suggestions received a total of 45,633 "likes".

In a few difficult or contentious cases, the advisory committee decided whether a post should be published or whether it was off topic or in infringement of netiquette.



3.2 Analysis and presentation of topic clusters by the advisory committee—13 April 2012

Starting on 2 April, the advisory committee proceeded to read all the postings. The members of the committee discussed the suggestions in depth for over 15 hours in four meetings in total. They identified several large topic clusters, which could be grouped by a certain general conditions.

Based on the input provided by the Viennese population, the Vienna Charter advisory committee identified three aspects to be addressed:

- behaviour = “getting along well”
- attitude = “not always the same”
- space = “feeling at home in a clean and tidy city”

Based on this structure, the advisory committee organised the postings into three topic clusters with subtopics:

getting along well: 717 postings

Good manners on the road and in public transport (294 postings)

Good manners and respect in everyday life (423 postings)

not always the same: 761 postings

Young and old (162 postings)

Speaking German—speaking other languages (95 postings)

I and those who are different from me (504 postings)

feeling at home in a clean and tidy city: 624 postings

A clean city (174 postings)

Public space—room for all of us (450 postings)

On Friday, 13 April, the advisory committee presented these topics for discussion in the Charter talks. The advisory committee also recommended that groups should try to discuss these topics with a view to how they themselves could bring about the desired changes, i.e., look for concrete ways in which to improve their environment.

The postings and topics were now no longer sorted only by time of posting, but also by topic cluster (postings that contained several suggestions were assigned to all appropriate topics). This made the process completely transparent - everyone could see to which topic a post had been assigned.

3.3 Charter talks - 13 April to 14 October 2012

With the Charter Talks, the centrepiece of the process, the Charter entered into its decisive and most important phase:

Charter talks were organised by partner organisations and individuals. Anyone who wanted to organise a Charter talk could register it online or by phone at the Charter hotline. The organisers could use pre-printed posters and flyers to which they only had to add the time and location of the event to advertise the talks, and the Charter logo was available on the website.

They had to organise a suitable location themselves. The venue should allow uninterrupted discussions. No special equipment was required. Ideally, a Charter talk should have 10 to 20 participants and be 1.5 to 2 hours in duration.

The organisers were free to decide whether they wanted to invite only a certain group of people (e.g., employees of a certain company, members of an association, etc.) or whether they wanted to make it an open group and extend the invitation to anyone who was interested. The times and venues of “open groups” were announced on the website and people interested in participating could sign up online.

The organisers could also decide the main topic for the discussion. They could either choose one of the three main topic clusters or let the participants decide themselves at the beginning of the discussion on what they wanted to focus.

No matter what the topic, they should always address the following questions:

- What is important for good neighbourly relations in Vienna?
- What do the participants expect from each other?
- What are they prepared to do?
- What should form part of the Vienna Charter?

In order to ensure the transparency of the Charter process, every Charter talk was announced on the website as soon as a date had been fixed. The group results were also posted online for others to read.

Moderation

As soon as a Charter talk was registered at the project office, the office staff began looking for moderators: From a pool of approximately 300 moderators, two were requested for each talk. They had two different roles: The main moderator was in charge of leading the discussion, while the co-moderator took notes and posted the group results on the homepage. The person organising talk and the main moderator received each other’s contact details from the Charter office so that they could discuss the event by phone or otherwise ahead of time. Usually the participants could find their group results online after only a few days.

There were requirements for the moderators: they had to have training and experience in moderating discussions of this type, and they had to be suggested by one of the partner organisations. Current holders of political offices and employees of political parties were excluded from being moderators. The moderators received a handbook containing all relevant information. As every group should be able to speak the language they preferred, bilingual and multilingual moderators were needed as well.

Everyone in the moderator pool indicated at which times they were available. As soon as they received a registration for a Charter talk, the employees at the Charter office began selecting moderators based on their availability. Frequently, people who did not know each other were asked to moderate together. The moderators were not matched to their moderating partners or the subject of the discussion, as the intention was to deploy the moderators to a wide range



Foto by Ismail Gökmen / P10

of settings instead of only environments they were used to. As a result, people frequently moderated in locations where they had never before been and where they were unlikely to return soon, at least not as moderators, e.g. in the Chief Executive Office of the Vienna City Administration or a migrants association, a branch office of the Raiffeisen bank, the Rapid football club, or a retirement home. At times, supporters of one political party would moderate the Charter talk of another party, people active in Catholic adult education would moderate for district organisations of the Social Democratic Party, or convinced atheists for inter-religious platforms.

The principle of the Charter, to bring people together without levelling or eradicating differences, was applied at all levels of the process (from the composition of the advisory committee and the diversity of partners to the moderation of the talks) to ensure the credibility of the Charter talks. Surprisingly, there were few problems, and the random assignment of moderator teams usually also worked well. In fact, many moderators appreciated this opportunity to broaden their horizons and to meet “different” people.

This positive attitude remained until the end of the process and the moderators’ commitment and enthusiasm was also reflected in the participants. The success of the Charter talks is in no small measure owed to the competence and enthusiasm of the moderators. The Charter office received nearly exclusively positive feedback concerning the moderators.

651 discussions with some 8500 participants

In total, 651 Charter talks were held in all districts of Vienna and at nearly any kind of venue imaginable (in club houses, pubs, offices, schools, people’s flats, parks, and public swimming pools). Some 8500 people participated in them, investing a total of 12,700 hours into discussing good neighbourly living. The participants represented a true cross-section of Vienna’s population: children, young people, senior citizens, blue and white collar workers, entrepreneurs, non-working persons as well as people with different mother tongues and countries of origin, people with special needs, people with different religious beliefs, worldviews and political opinions, and people with different sexual orientations.

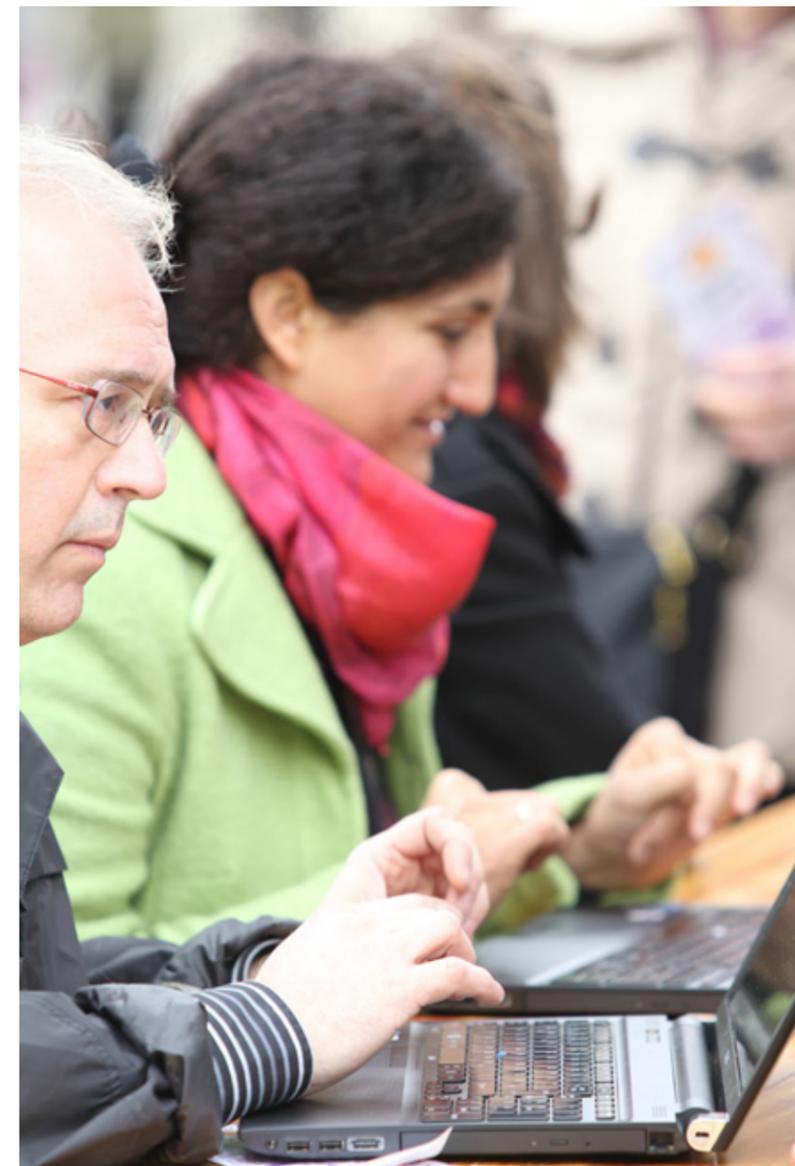
Particularly at the beginning of the talks, the participants were sometimes unsure what to do: What exactly are you supposed to do at a Charter talk—just talk? And what exactly are you supposed to talk about? The hesitation was visible. We are used to talking about concrete topics or to making demands of someone who is not present (the building management, our boss, politicians...). We are also used to speaking in a certain role (e.g. as a representative of an organisation). But talking to each other as individuals, without any of the familiar rituals of conversation? At times, this required some effort, but the results were worth it: People who already knew each other well from work, even were in the same team, said how surprising and enriching such conversations were and how the experience would influence their working relationship as well. The same went for members of the same club or people who always went to the same park: “We never talk like this,” they said.

The most fascinating Charter talks occurred where borders of some kind were crossed: Where a football cage in the yard got teenagers and adults talking, where women from the tenants advisory committee and Muslim women started talking in a municipal housing project, or where people with different political, religious, or other beliefs began communicating with each other. All the emotions, all the things that were set in motion in these conversations, can be guessed at when the participants talk about them, but they could never be fully captured in a protocol or summary.

3.4 Online discussion—28 September to 14 October 2012

In the final project phase, while Charter talks were still being held, people had a second opportunity to join the discussion online. The group results obtained so far for each of the seven subtopics were summarised as a basis for the discussion. The online discussion forum was again moderated by neu&kühn.

Foto by Ismail Gökmen / PID



3.5 Project conclusion and presentation of the Vienna Charter

Some 10,000 Viennese were actively involved in developing the Vienna Charter online or offline. Although there had been doubts during the planning phase and at the beginning of the process as to whether it would even be possible to create a single text from the many, possibly divergent, opinions, the results were very surprising: The vast majority of the contributions and wishes overlapped strongly in several key issues, so that the main contents and core elements of the text nearly wrote themselves. They were assembled into the “Vienna Charter”, which was presented to the public as the result of the process in a press conference on 27 November 2012.

4 Talks that shape the future

No single text could reflect all the ideas, suggestions and results of all the discussion groups involved in this process. Therefore, all group results are still available online and can serve as a source of inspiration. They provide a glimpse into the serious in-depth debates of the Charter talks, and reflect the energy and creativity with which the people of Vienna want to shape their neighbourly relations.

The result of the process is much more than just a text. It is what happened during the talks and is still happening: People have begun to approach each other or grown closer, they have discussed concrete initiatives and decided on steps for the future.

A few examples of results of group discussions with long-term effects:

- Adults were irritated by the noise in the yard, adolescents by the neighbours shouting at them: The adults and teenagers got together and agreed on a few concrete points: The teenagers will keep the noise down after 8 PM and tell others to do so as well. The adults will no longer shout at them from their balconies. If they have something to say to the teenagers, they will go down to the courtyard - and organise a house party with all the neighbours.
- In one residential building, there were frequent problems between people with special needs in an assisted living project and their neighbours. They decided to get to know each other better.
- In one building, the boys agreed to let the girls play in the football cage as well - even if that is sometimes difficult.
- Taxi drivers in training will spend some time with tram and bus drivers on their routes to experience road traffic from their perspective.
- A group of women from the tenants advisory committee and Muslim women from Turkey and Arab countries got together and talked for the first time - about what bothers them about each other, but also about how they live and what they think. After the Charter talk was over, they stayed and sat there drinking tea. Since then, they have already joined together in several initiatives. The Charter talk bridged the gap that previously existed between them.
- The tenants of a municipal housing project decided to get together regularly in an informal atmosphere to improve the communication in the building.
- People living next to a mosque and representatives of the mosque discussed their problems with each other in a Charter talk. They agreed to organise regular talks between contact persons chosen by each group and to organise a party together.
- In youth centres, in retirement homes, and in municipal housing projects... In numerous discussions everyone agreed that simply saying hello when you meet someone improves the atmosphere. And so they decided to greet each other in future.



Vienna is home: for women and men, for young and old, for those who were born here and for those who moved to the city, for people with different worldviews, beliefs and needs. To get along well, we need to respect each other. Respect means accepting other people the way they are—in a way how we ourselves wish to be accepted and respected. Human rights are our common basis!

Good manners and respect in everyday life

Getting along well in a big city is a challenge. There are many different interests and lifestyles—in the neighbourhood, on the road, in the parks, in public transport, in coffee houses and restaurants, on sports grounds...

Greeting and helping each other, talking with each other, saying “please” and “thank you”—are all common courtesies. If we find something annoying we should mention it clearly and politely. Being able to put yourself in someone else’s position can avoid or reduce many aggressions.



Good manners on the road and in public transport

Millions of people are on the roads in Vienna—they are in a hurry or just stroll through the city, they walk or use public transport. And they meet each other daily. To get along well in public space we need to respect each other. We need to observe the road regulations and try to stay calm to avoid conflicts. We should avoid talking loudly on the phone or listening to loud music on public transport and, in general, respect other passengers.

I and those who are different from me

The many different lifestyles in our city are an enrichment. But they can also be overwhelming. Being open to other lifestyles and interested in them is the best way to live as good neighbours. It is up to everyone of us how we choose to live but we are responsible for each other. It is beneficial to be open towards other people’s habits and experiences. We should consider our own needs and those of others. Everyone is unique and because we may have had a negative experience with someone from a certain ethnic group we must not think that others from the group are exactly the same. We can see the differences but we focus on our common humanity.



Speaking German—speaking other languages

Communicating and talking with each other is essential to understand each other. People in Vienna speak many different languages. This is a sign of diversity. If we want to live together as good neighbours we have to speak the same language. We should be understanding and supportive if someone has only started learning German. If your German is still poor you should continue to improve it. It is also important to speak and study your first language in Vienna. Different languages and different cultures have been part of Vienna’s identity for many centuries.

Young and old

People of different ages meet in Vienna everyday. They have different interests in their leisure time and may have different ideas about what good neighbourly relations in our city should look like. We want Vienna to be a child and young people friendly city—noisy children are not noise pollution! However, it is also a major concern for all of us that senior citizens feel cared for and at home in Vienna. We listen to other generations and are interested in their experiences. We respect senior citizens and we give children and young people the appreciation and space they deserve.



A clean city

Clean streets, sidewalks, courtyards, parks, playgrounds, meadows and forests are important for all of us! We consider the environment because we want to live in a clean city. We do not just dump our waste and throw cigarette stubs on the streets. We clean up after our dogs. We feel responsible for the city we live in.

Public space—room for all of us

There should be plenty of opportunities in public space for leisure time, meeting and talking, and there should be plenty of space for all of us. We should actively participate in designing and maintaining public space and accept different needs. We search for joint solutions and sustainable compromise.





The Vienna Charter in figures

- 325 partner organisations
- 651 Charter talks in all districts of Vienna
- 8,500 participants invested more than 12,500 hours in good neighbourly relations
- More than 47,000 online contributions and likes were submitted

City of  Vienna

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