

The lesson described here took place in an Austrian secondary school. The students are in the 10th grade, are between 15 and 16 years old, and have chosen geography and economics as an elective subject. This means that every two weeks they have a double lesson in which they can work more freely on topics outside the curriculum. In this context, the topic of sustainable urban planning was covered over three double lessons, with large parts of the lessons taking place outside of school, directly in the district being discussed.

CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

"Yeah, let's plan a good kebab shop there." Andi points to a vacant commercial space marked on the map in front of him. Michi replies, "Nah, I don't know, I'm sure we're only supposed to plan green businesses." Andi pauses briefly to think. "Yeah, you're probably right. Then let's just make it a vegan kebab shop. I think you have to be able to get a kebab somewhere." – "But do we want a vegan kebab?"



Five boys sit on a park bench in a quiet courtyard and discuss their ideas for redesigning → Annenstraße in Graz in the Roseggerhaus area. In the last double lesson, the teacher gave the students an insight into the historical development of Annenstraße, which is only a few minutes' walk from the school building. Three

groups were then formed, each focusing on different sections of the street and → tasked with photographing problems – numerous vacant properties, high levels of impervious surfaces, high noise pollution, generally poor quality of life. Today, the students are to develop visions for a new design and visualize them on a map.



Five minutes' walk away, a group is sitting near Südtiroler Platz, directly in front of the Graz Art Museum, at the beginning of Annenstraße. It is noisy and smells of exhaust fumes. They are explaining their concept to the teacher. "Yes, and because of the traffic, we thought we would build an underground car park so that cars could park a little further away and so on." The teacher nods kindly, but then says, "Yes, and could there be another option?" The students look at him questioningly. "Well, you could ask yourself why cars need to drive here at all, in the middle of the city, couldn't you?" No one answers for a moment, then a student says, "Hmm, yes, we hadn't thought about that."

In the next double lesson, the students first have time to prepare their impressions and ideas from the last two units. Then the three groups present their results. The group working on the area around Südtiroler Platz begins. Before their presentation starts, one student anticipates: *"Much of what we are showing is not really feasible, we know that anyway."* The teacher replies, *"Yes, but we're talking about utopias right now!"* The student nods and begins to present his group's ideas: no cars, no buses, no tram tracks, but a subway. Large tech companies are to be located in the vacant buildings, because these are missing from the city center. For tourists, there will be a modern hotel and free Wi-Fi everywhere. The teacher nods and asks, *"Yes, why isn't a subway being built in Graz?"* For a few minutes, a wide variety of reasons are discussed as to why a subway in Graz is so difficult to implement—historic burial sites, the need to dig very deep due to the river

running through the middle of the city, high costs, etc.

The Roseggerhaus group then presents its → concept beginning with the words: *"We want to make the area more attractive for tourists and the people who live there."* The group also wants to ban cars, separate the cycle path and footpath, and plant trees. They want to plan sports fields in courtyards and rooftop bars on the roofs. Probably the biggest change: the church is to be torn down, and the Mühlgang (a small stream that runs mostly underground) is to be dammed up to form a lake in this newly gained space, around which a park is to be created. The teacher asks, somewhat surprised, *"You want to just tear down the church?"* Andi replies, *"Yep,"* and continues with the presentation. The lesson ends with the teacher thanking the students for the concepts they presented and for their participation.

THE TEACHER TELLS ME (→ CONVERSATION)

... that he chose Annenstraße because, although it is so close to the school, he feels that the students have no connection to this place because they all live in other parts of the city or even in the surrounding area. During the group work, he asks a group of students: *"What would it take for you to want to live here? Because we've just been talking and I think you don't really have any connection to this place and are now planning things that you think I'll like, right? But what would it take for you to want to live here?"* Andi says that it would simply have to be much quieter. Michi replies that he wouldn't want to live here anyway, *"because it's just a street. It's much nicer in the countryside."*