Abstract

Evaluation of the Pilot Experiment „Forum-10"

as supporting forum for tenant's advisory boards in Vienna's 10th district

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The aim of this research project has been to make statements about how different parties evaluate the process of developing and establishing Forum-10 and to deduce recommendations for the further development of Forum-10 as well as for the transferability of this model. Next to a document analysis and a participant observation interviews haven been conducted with tenants' representatives, wohnpartner employees, representatives of Wiener Wohnen, the regional administration and of urban research.

Basically, the networking of tenants' representatives in Vienna shows different models from strongly bottom-up orientated processes to processes organised rather top-down; from structures monopolized more or less by party politics to structures that explicitly seek independence; from locally manageable to Vienna-wide structures with high memberships. Forum-10 shows a process defined **bottom-up as well as top-down**. On the one hand the tenants' representatives very much took the initiative and are now, after the establishment, organising themselves. On the other hand the GB_wohn or wohnpartner takes care of the moderation of the process within the networking structure, but also between the tenants' representatives and other actors like Wiener Wohnen or politics. In this way **acceptance** of the networking structure could be achieved inwardly as well as outwardly.

Forum-10 is a manageable model characterized by a strong identification of tenants' representatives with the process and the networking structure; thus learning processes have been and are still made possible. On the one hand these **learning processes** concerned the work of the tenants' representatives, since it enabled exchange and reflection on the work as tenants' representatives. Additionally Forum-10 makes new contacts available that are important to the work of the tenants' representation. On the other hand these learning processes concern democratic action. Forum-10 as a situation that enables learning **participatory democratic action** is valued not only by the tenants' representatives, but is valuable from the perspective of politics as well. Due to the small-scale networking of tenants' representatives in the foreground of discussions were topical issues that could be dealt with and kept away from instrumentalisation by party politics or right-wing populism. **Nonalignment with party politics** was important to the tenants' representatives as well as a prerequisite for the acceptance of Forum-10 by the tenants' representatives. Had there been a party political bias of the network less tenants' representatives would have participated and less tenants' representatives would have felt represented by Forum-10. Yet for actors on the level of city and district politics and for Wiener Wohnen nonalignment with party politics is also a prerequisite for their acceptance of and cooperation with Forum-10. This nonalignment has to a great extent been secured by the backup of GB_wohn or wohnpartner.

GB_wohn or wohnpartner supported the processes of negotiation among tenants' representatives, helped with establishing Forum-10, yet afterwards took a back seat and handed its organisation over to the tenants' representatives. Furthermore GB_wohn or wohnpartner took on the task of providing for the involvement of other actors like **Wiener Wohnen as well as actors on the level of district and city politics**. The evaluation shows that these actors should be involved to the extent that they are informed about the development of the network. But they should not participate in the actual networking so that they cannot affect and instrumentalise the networking. It is recommended for the network and the customer service centre to communicate on a regular basis, other actors – like the management of Wiener Wohnen, on the level of the town council or district politics – can be contacted as the need arises. There are conflicting views as to the role of district politics. On the one hand the networking of tenants' advisory boards was on topical issues that concern Wiener Wohnen, on the other hand tenants' representatives were also able to communicate the interests of the tenants to the districts.

The **expectations** on the networking of tenants' representatives varies between the various actors; it ranges from learning situation for the tenants' representatives, joint contact for tenants' concerns, 'sensor' for the district, up to pool of experts for further developing the status of tenants' participation. The evaluation shows that if many tenants' representatives can be contacted via one network this is to the advantage especially of Wiener Wohnen. Forum-10 furthermore made it possible to improve the communication between tenants' representatives and Wiener Wohnen. Yet, the customer services centre feared a higher amount of work.

The evaluation also shows that networks cannot solve problems that are in general due to the **regulations for tenants' participation** or to the support of the work of tenants' advisory boards. On the one hand these problems might even be reinforced since in networks tenants' representatives meet 'like-minded' people and therefore have fewer reasons to reach out to other groups in their housing complex. On the other hand networks can make it easier for new tenants' representatives to start working in a tenants' advisory board. For the tenants' representatives networks provide a forum for exchange as well as the opportunity to bundle and jointly represent their interests externally.

Initiating and establishing the pilot project Forum-10 was rather resource-intensive for GB_wohn. The evaluation makes it possible to make use of the experiences in future processes. The following summarizes the most important recommendations for dealing with networks of tenants' advisory boards in the future:

- Supporting a small-scale network of tenants' advisory boards with **the backup of an independent institution** enables the prevention of party political instrumentalisation.

- **Small-scale networks** support participatory democratic processes concerned with topical issues.

- Manageability encourages tenants' representatives **learning processes** as well as the identification with the network and the work of tenants' advisory boards.

- Interest in the network should come **from tenants' representatives.**

- For initiating and establishing the network support by an institution like wohnpartner should be granted in case the tenants' representatives wish for it. In this capacity wohnpartner could watch over the **transparency of the processes** (minutes, decision-making process etc.) and also act as an interface to other actors, thus ensuring **the involvement of Wiener Wohnen as well as the information of politics**. Yet after the establishment wohnpartner should take a back seat and allow for the autonomy of the network. Its function is to watch out for transparency (broad invitations, minutes). In case the tenants' representatives do not want the support of wohnpartner wohnpartner should nevertheless stay in touch with the tenants' representatives.

- At the foundation of a network all tenants' representatives should be included and invited, they should be enabled to participate on a broad scale.

- Initiation and networking processes should be given due time so that they can enable learning processes and allow for decisions concerning the orientation and organisation of the network that receive broad support. This decision-making process clarifies whether the network should be used primarily **for exchange and/or for an external representation**. Concerning external representation attention should be paid especially to the transparency of the decision-finding structures

It became apparent that the tenants' representatives regard the support of their network as recognition of the work of the tenants' advisory boards by the city represented by the town council office.