
Summary of the Expert Survey

Regarding the Pilot Project "Parti. im Bau" (Parti. in Municipal Housing Estates)

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Starting Point of the Study

The participation statute for tenants of "Wiener Wohnen" (Vienna Housing Authority) provides for an interest group specifically for children and adolescents. This right, however, is used rather rarely. In most cases, neither young people nor adults know enough about the different ways to participate and get involved in their building or housing estate. Besides that, there is also a lack of public relations work as well as a certain amount of reluctance among the respective tenants' associations to support such processes.

The pilot project "Parti. im Bau", which is intended to last several years, aims to work with tenants' associations and young people to help them develop a *respectful and strong culture of dialogue at their housing estates*. The Otto Probst Estate (10th district) and the Karl Marx Hof (19th district) were chosen for this project as they have already had active tenants' associations for some years. Thanks to the increasing level of cooperation between the area renewal offices ("Gebietsbetreuungen") and the local youth centers it will be much easier for youths and tenants' representatives to get into contact.

The main goal of the accompanying research is to convey all the data and knowledge acquired in this pilot project to anyone who is interested.

In this context, three research questions were relevant:

- What are the main concerns of the respective youths and tenants' representatives?
- How can cross-institutional communication be established?
- What basic conditions are necessary to promote participation processes in a housing estate?

Implementation

This study is based on the principles of qualitative social research. The applied socio-scientific methods comprise 16 expert and guided interviews and 4 group interviews. These were carried out, on the one hand, to acquire specific knowledge on location and, on the other hand, to draw up general guidelines for young people's participation in their immediate residential environment. Groups of youngsters were interviewed to find out about their specific life situations with regard to participation in the building or estate they live in. In order to learn more about their work and concerns, group interviews were also conducted with the tenants' associations.

General Results

None of the two tenants' associations have a youth representative. They also have very little democratic backing, and the turnout tends to be rather low whenever new tenants' representatives are elected. Nevertheless, the members of both tenants' associations have proven to be very communicative and socially committed.

They take on many different roles: as mediators between tenants and builders, as a social buffer in conflicts with the landlord, as a conveyor of knowledge, whenever they inform about maintenance costs, etc., as on-site managers, and as a social sensor. This great diversity of roles, however, often renders them incapable of carrying out their work successfully in conflict situations. Furthermore, they also get very little recognition from the landlords.

As to the situation of young people, quite a lot of similarities could be found between the two housing estates in this project: The adults' values and definitions of usage differ from the forms of appropriation observed among children and youths. Young people tend to ignore the existing and/or to create new localizations. The conflict here lies in the fact that youngsters often use spaces in other ways than how adults would like to see them being used. This frequently leads to disagreements and quarrels about too much noise or a presumed improper usage of public space. The playful ways applied by many young people to appropriate social space are usually met with very little or no understanding.

Both adults and youths appear to have a resigned or even consumerist attitude towards participation and co-determination in their own communities. Most tenants state that *"there is nothing to be changed"*. Or, if there is indeed a need for change, that *"it won't help anyway"* or that *"this is, after all, the tenants' associations' responsibility"*.

General Recommendations

Community work generally provides the basis for the participation of and communication between local interest groups. Such an approach makes it easier to articulate one's interests in person, without diminishing other positions: This way they become more apparent, since the different actors can voice them personally and in a protected space. In other words, young people have the possibility to present their own interests to the public, and all the neighbors can likewise state their wishes directly and individually. Thus everyone will find it easier to begin to understand other people's needs, even if they differ from one's own.

Furthermore, local community work can provide a foundation for fruitful dialogue, which will in the long term improve trust, articulation, and conflict-solving in the neighborhood. Communicative prevention (e.g. moderation at tenants' association meetings) is an essential factor on the path towards new, local conflict management strategies.

Community work enables the people involved to voice their opinions and take part in decision-making processes, thus encouraging the tenants of a housing estate to develop new social skills. The main focus here is on the use of collective goods, as for instance public space, which are prone to be a source of conflict whenever the appropriation processes of different user groups collide. Taking account of social space, community work can provide new opportunities for communication and participation.

The findings from the expert interviews demonstrate that tenants' associations are most successful if they personally talk to and maintain regular contact with the tenants at the estate. At the Karl Marx Hof, for example, the tenants' association has weekly consultation hours in the Tenants' Room. The representatives of this association should ideally show civil courage, know their way around the premises, and not make light of the problems and conflicts within the estate. They need to have high social skills and an understanding for the tenants' different interests.

Young people often find the tenants' association to be too bureaucratic to be used as an instrument of participation. Therefore the pilot project needs to continue to search for a way to make it more accessible to them.

Some experts have their doubts about the effectiveness of the tenants' association as a conflict solving tool in housing estates. This task calls for people with special training, which cannot be expected from the tenants who are elected to the association.

In order to become reasonably self-sufficient and to obtain the support of local social institutions in its effort to integrate all the different interests, the tenants' association needs to find suitable training opportunities for its representatives. Participation in such training measures should be stimulating and inspiring and ought to be rewarded in some way, especially because the work is carried out on a voluntary basis.

The tenants' association is most effective if the team of tenants' representatives shows civil courage, if it is highly esteemed by the estate's occupants, and if it takes up a liberal attitude towards all the different user groups. Besides that, it is also important that the institution is in good standing and enjoys the respect of both neighbors and city officials. The more it is recognized and valued by people and organizations alike, the more attractive it will become for potential volunteers.