

Executive Summary

Participation in Housing Projects: A study on tenants' motives and expectations in state subsidized council housing with participation possibilities in Vienna

This study analyses participation in planning and design of housing space by (prospective) tenants in four subsidized council housing projects (from now onwards referred to as housing projects) in Vienna. As there is an increase in possibilities to take part in participation processes and it also becomes more and more demanded from the recipients' sites, the focus of this study is on tenants' expectations, motives for moving-in and the specific target groups that are considered as group of persons interested in participation projects. Furthermore the study covers tenants' perceptions and their assessment of the participation process.

Research has been conducted between **September 2013 and December 2013**, whereby the focus is laid on three housing projects that allow flexibility and possibility of participation in design and planning of living space but demand in comparison to joint building ventures a much lower degree of self-organization.

Examined housing units:

	Project	Property developer	Architects	Participation management	Move-in date	Number of units
1	so.vie.so Sonnwendviertel	BWS-Gruppe	Schindler&Szedenik	wohnbund:consult	Nov.13	111
2	join in Mautner Markhof	Familienwohnbau	Tillner & Willinger	kon-text	vss. Apr.14	74
3	Jakov-Lind-Straße Nordbahnhof	Sozialbau (Urbanbau)	Sne Veselinovic	Österr. Integrationsfonds	Dec.12	106
4	Grellgasse Gerasdorfer Str.	Sozialbau	Syntax Architektur	Dr. Joachim Brech	Dec. 2013	67

Key objectives:

- 1) Evaluation of three participation projects on account of the target groups, tenants' reasons for moving-in, their expectations and wishes with regards to design and planning of living space, and
- 2) reaching conclusions on future planning and design of housing for property developers, participation management and the housing subsidy system, based on the findings of this study.

Methods:

- Literature research
- Document analysis
- Participation in meetings and on-site inspections
- Expert interviews (with experts from the field of property developers, architects, participation-management and from Wohnservice Wien)
- Secondary analysis of a dataset on interested persons provided by Wohnservice Wien
- Online-survey with tenants
- Qualitative interviews with tenants

Results of the evaluation:

Interest in participation

The general interest in participation – especially in housing-related participation – is very high, both in the case of Wohnservice respondents as well as in the case of the analysed housing units. Whereby respondents that have registered for a housing project with participation possibilities and went through the participation process were more interested than respondents registered at the Wohnservice. Nearly all tenants (93%) are very/rather interested in **participation in planning of their flat** and 69% in **participation in planning of common rooms and open spaces**. Since the interest even increased in the course of the process it can be assumed that the participation process has been, for the majority of the respondents, neither a frustrating experience nor has it called into question their evaluation of the value of participation in housing projects. The **tenants' interest in self-organisation**, such as tenant meetings as well as management and use of common rooms and open spaces, is equally strong prevalent (in each case ca. 2/3 of respondents indicate interest). Approximately an equal number of persons that are interested on the latter are also interested in participation in the *planning* of the same area. With regard to participation in the **planning of the flat**, respondents from 40 years on up and people born in Austria were significantly more frequently interested; with respect to the **participation in common rooms and open spaces** respondents between 40 and 49 years were significantly more frequently interested.

Participation as the reason to move-in

Not surprisingly, the quantitative survey showed that the possibilities for participation was neither the most frequent nor the most important reason to move-in for respondents, which is also reflected in other studies on participation. More central are “push-factors” linked to the old flat/area of residence (such as small size or high amount of costs of the old flat), followed by the frequently and in all housing projects mentioned public transport connection of the new area of residence. Nevertheless was the **possibility to participate listed in total as the third most frequent reason for moving-in** and from no fewer than 30% of the respondents also ranked under the three most important reasons for moving-in. However, there is **significant difference according to the respective housing project**: more than half of the respondents from the so.vie.so and join in housing project indicate participation as a general reason for moving-in, but only just under a third of respondents from the Jakov-Lind-Straße. These differences were all the more apparent with regard to the three *most important* reasons for moving-in: In total, 43% of respondents from the so.vie.so project and 38% from the join in project indicated participation as second and/or third important reason – whereas no respondent ranked participation among the three most important reasons from the Jakov-Lind-Straße. **Participation was overall indicated as a reason to move-in** significantly more frequently from respondents from 40 years on up and from respondents who attach importance to neighbourhood. Especially respondents, which graduated from Fach-/Handelsschule and from higher education, indicated **participation as prior-ranking** reason for moving-in.

Taking part in the participation process

Looking at the different housing projects the tenants from so.vie.so took part most frequently in the participation process with regard to the planning of the flat. In terms of the planning of common rooms and open spaces respondents from the join in housing project were most frequently involved. While over three thirds of the respondents of so.vie.so attended at least one of the scheduled meetings, join in respondents attended only 56% of the scheduled meetings (no data available for Jakov-

Lind-Straße). People with Matura or higher education participated significantly more frequently in **the planning of the flat**; in terms of the **participation in the planning of common rooms and open spaces** people who graduated from a Fachschule, Handelsschule or from higher education as well as households with children/young people were represented significantly more frequent. Taking into account the **reasons for not taking part** in the three phases, it turned out to be especially the late entrance into the participation process, which appeared relevant. Particularly with the planning of the flat this has been the main reason why respondents did not take part in it. Simultaneously, the tenants time resources play a major role and affects whether people participate in the different processes.

Implementation of participation possibilities

In the qualitative interviews many respondents express that they had concrete ideas on where their flat should be located within the building already **in the run-up to the planning of the flat**. At the same time, people had already a picture for certain details such as floor coverings or bathroom equipment. Hereby, a central aspect is the invitation to deal with own ideas and wishes and think through different options. The majority of respondents of all three housing projects state that in the flat-catalogue (Wohnungskatalog) they found a type of flat that entirely corresponded with their wishes. However, different possibilities were used in all three housing projects to make changes. Regarding the **reasons** why described changes were made, the central points were the optimal utilisation of space as well as aesthetical demands. Simultaneously, many changes were implemented in order to adjust technical infrastructure and facilities to the specific individual requirements. The qualitative interviews showed that due to the lack of experience in planning of common areas in the past, there existed considerable reluctance to articulate ideas and wishes in this area. It was only when collaborative processes were enabled that the tenants could deal with them more in detail and develop concrete planning ideas. According to the observations by the interviewed experts from the **so.vie.so** and **join in** projects, **community-building** occurred gradually in the course of the on-going meetings before the actual moving-in and was supported by the respective participation management. As in the case of the **Jakov-Lind-Straße** the community-building process occurred less pronounced and started only after moving into the housing project.

Further wishes for participation

In comparison to other areas of participation, most of the wishes were expressed with respect to the **planning and interior equipment of the flat**, which comes as no surprise in face of the higher intensity of the participation process in this area and respectively the possibilities of designing the individual immediate environment. It was particularly interesting that within all three housing projects respondents pointed to participation possibilities that were offered in principle, however, were sometimes not available to all households due to structural and architectural as well as temporal or organisational reasons. Respondents expressed clearly less frequently wishes in terms of planning, interior equipment, utilisation and design of **common rooms and open spaces** in comparison to planning and interior equipment of the flat. There exists substantial difference between Jakov-Lind-Straße and the other housing projects in this respect: Thus, respondents from Jakov-Lind-Straße express the wish to participate in the first place as well as the desire for better communication of participation possibilities.

Assessment of the participation process

The **information on planning of common rooms and open spaces** was assessed to be sufficient from 81% of respondents from so.vie.so, 71% of respondents of join in but only 11% of respondents from

Jakov-Lind-Straße. Furthermore the assessment of **information on the planning of the flat** shows especially respondents from Jakov-Lind-Straße dissatisfied. Presumably the different and less intensively organised participation process played hereby a role. The survey reveals that tenants from the so.vie.so housing project feel comparatively best informed about **participation after moving-in**, which is presumably again linked to the intensity and way of tenants organisation after moving into the housing project. The assessment of all respondents' show that the participation process was – at least on average – **perceived** as rather positive in several aspects. The participation process was felt rather as *slow* (tendency towards neutral assessment regarding the conceptual pair slow/fast), which is probably related to the fact that participation requires time and a greater extent of attention on the part of the (prospective) tenants in comparison to conventional housing projects. There was a tendency in all three housing projects to assess the process as, which indicates that it was rather clear how, for instance, the participation process will take place and respectively what contribution was demanded from tenants. The participation process in the course of the so.vie.so housing project gained the most positive ratings in comparison to the other housing projects (particularly with respect to *motivation* and *organisation*).

Positive aspects of the participation process from an experts' viewpoint¹

so.vie.so

- Cost-awareness of tenants
- Resolution of interest-conflicts
- Reducing fear in terms of decision-making through frequent meetings
- Cooperation between experts
- Participation management and supervision
- Lengthy lead time as necessary condition for trust, community-building and self-organisation

join in

- Participation management and external moderation
- Openness of tenants and common decision-making
- Transparent processes and clearly defined framework of participation
- Communication via Homepage
- Experience that participation is also possible within the framework of "standardised" social housing

Difficulties, learning processes, and improvement possibilities from an experts view

so.vie.so

- Possibly excessive demand of tenants because of excess in choice possibilities
- High effort for flexible size of balcony
- Tenants' understanding for value of common rooms/spaces
- Partially high effort through consulting service for planning of flat

join in

- Lengthy lead time as area of conflict
- Interim decrease of motivation
- Risk of difficulties in re-letting
- Tenants' weak or lack of understanding of plans/layouts

Perception of the property developer, participation management and architects

The respondents of the join in and so.vie.so housing project express very similar positive responses with regards to architects and property developers, although architects are even better rated than property developer. The respondents from Jakov-Lind-Straße assessed the cooperation with the ar-

¹ The following points deal especially with the so.vie.so and join in housing project due to the particular high degree of self-reflexion among the experts from these two projects.

chitects as less good, which can be explained by the fact that tenants had only indirect contact with the architects. The decision-making process in terms of the planning of common rooms and open spaces received the best judgement in the so.vie.so housing project.

General assessment of participation in housing projects

Success criteria

- Interest/engagement of all involved parties
- Tenants' decision for a certain housing project at an early stage
- Longer period of time until the moving-in date
- Clear, reciprocal and continual communication
- Transparency regarding financial, technical and organisational processes
- Qualified participation management

Framework conditions

- Social sustainability as a competitive criteria
- Sufficient financial resources
- Enable affordability for tenants
- Unclear definition of participation projects
- More flexibility in the early phases of participation within a competition
- An overarching planning of construction sites
- Infrastructural expansion on time
- Round table of experienced experts and tenants working as future project consultants

Central competences that tenants require for a participation process are: 1) openness, willingness to compromise, tolerance, interest, asking questions as well as 2) spatial imagination, reading architectural drafts, ability of spatial orientation.

According to the experts there also exists limitations to participation due to: 1) costs and respectively the given budget, 2) technic and statics, 3) the later reusability of the flat and 4) the legal building regulations. On the other hand, limitations are drawn earlier or later according to: 1) the personal attitudes of experts, 2) the respective willingness and openness to engage in the participation process as well as 3) the understanding of the respective role and responsibility on the part of the experts.

In summary, the general value of participation is a reduced potential for conflict between property developer and tenants as well as a stronger identification with the immediate residential environment. And participation furthermore supports the relationship between the tenants of a building. Participation in housing projects can not only contribute to the realisation of dream living spaces on a small scale but furthermore allows in a city such as Vienna to fulfil different housing needs of various tenants.

Conclusions for future housing and living space planning

Building on the results of the study different direct and indirect recommendations for actions were drawn for the housing policy that relate to the following thematic areas: 1) framework conditions for submission and planning of projects, 2) networking, exchange and information on participation, 3) organisation of the participation process, 4) attitude towards tenants, respectively definition of roles of professional actors, 5) communication, 6) participation in the planning of the flat, 7) participation in common rooms/open spaces and 8) further need for research.

Overall it turns out that participation in housing projects is workable and promising for the future. When the potential is used in a meaningful way various processes can be simplified and additional efforts can be reduced.