

PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF OLDER PEOPLE ON THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

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For many older people their own precinct or neighbourhood gains in importance with increasing time spent at home and lower mobility (needs). The precinct stands thus for opportunities of communication and participation. Therefore, senior-friendly or age-integrated planning needs to include thinking about structures of communication and participation in order to support and enable older people taking part in the social life of the precinct and generally. This is what the research project “QuartiersNETZ” (“neighbourhood network”) aims to develop. While the project includes the development and testing of innovative senior-focused technical interaction and communication media, this paper concentrates on the development of participation structures in the precincts. It describes the approach towards the so-called participation models and presents first steps and insights of the ongoing participation process. The paper also includes a discussion about different understandings of participation, with a focus on the views of planners and community workers, and reviews what the differences in understanding mean for the implementation of participation structures on the ground. This includes the balancing act between broad participation and the capacity to act. Furthermore, first ideas on how the established networks could continue after the termination of the project are discussed.

1 Introduction

Demographic change leads to a number of challenges for planning and urban development in Western countries. It is characterised by different developments, such as population decline, a growth of the proportion of older people – both caused by low fertility rates and low mortality rates – as well as a growing diversity, e.g. ethnical and cultural diversity through immigration, changing and more diverse lifestyles and family and household structures. However, while those demographic changes take place overall, the intensity and occurrence differ between different cities and regions. For instance, some cities grow in population size, while others decrease. At the same time within those cities there is also a concurrence of growth and shrinkage as there are areas that grow and other areas that lose population. The same can be observed for the other characteristics of demographic change. Thus, demographic change is unevenly distributed.

Challenges for planning lie therefore in planning for a more diverse society and older population, in moving away from the growth paradigm towards planning for shrinkage and at the same time planning for different circumstances within the same city. Further current challenges for cities which also influence planning are the increasing competition between cities, the growing social fragmentation and polarisation processes as well as the growing call for (true) participation coming from different parts of the community (Schmidt, 2014; Roth, 2011).

This paper will focus on the challenges (and opportunities) arising from the ageing of society as well as the call for (true) participation. The consequences of the growing proportion of older people are discussed in many areas. The public discussion, for example, is mainly concerned with the effects on economic competitiveness and the future of the social security systems. Other discussions include the impacts on care and medical services and the implications for community work. The planning discussion started with a strong focus on barrier-free urban design and architecture, but has shifted to a more comprehensive view that includes issues such as local supply, mobility opportunities, social life etc. (Bleck et al., 2015).

Both within the planning discussion and the field of community work the debate has gained a focus on the significance of the neighbourhood as a spatial level. With increasing age the neighbourhood gains in importance for people because of lower mobility (needs) and the increase in time spent at home and within the surrounding area (Rübler, 2007; Knopp & van Rießen, 2014). Low mobility

can be caused by health or financial reasons, while low mobility needs mean that people can fulfil most of their demands and needs within proximity and they are not required to travel elsewhere (e.g. for work). This underlines the significance of well-functioning neighbourhoods and areas where as many necessary services as possible are available. This also means that the neighbourhood stands for opportunities of communication and interaction for (older) people. Therefore, senior-friendly and age-integrated planning needs to include thinking about structures of communication and participation, in order to facilitate the involvement and contribution of older people to the precinct and its social life.

Another reason why the local level has become more prominent in planning is the trend towards (participatory) governance and the communicative turn in planning. The local level is often considered the most suitable for community participation as it is the level which is closest to the community and their lives (Roth, 2011). Also, local institutions and organisations are often less specialised and thus more open to community involvement. Furthermore, devolution means that the local level has gained in importance.

This paper brings together the views of planners and community workers on the neighbourhood, the ageing of society and participation. While community workers come from the “social side” and emphasise the empowerment of people and the need for inclusive neighbourhoods, the planners come from the “planning side” and emphasise the need for a more needs-oriented planning which leads to a better acceptance of projects, better planning and a better environment for the residents. This directs the planners to a “more social view” and the community workers to a “more spatial view”.

The paper describes the research project “QuartiersNETZ” (“neighbourhood network”) in which researchers and practitioners work together to involve older people into participative neighbourhood development as well as the development and testing of innovative senior-focused technical interaction and communication media. The paper concentrates on the participation processes and the approach towards the so-called participation models. The second section explores views on participation and governance and differences between the planning discussion and the discussion within the community work literature. This includes a discussion about the balancing act between broad participation and the capacity to act. This will offer the background for the discussion of first results of the project. Then the project QuartiersNETZ and its approach towards participation are explained and the four case study areas are described. Subsequently, the first steps and results of the project are presented. The conclusion reflects on the impacts of different understandings of participation and on the possibility of developing enduring structures.

2 Participation, empowerment and problem solving

The project QuartiersNETZ has as one objective to develop participation structures (and models) in order to include older people into neighbourhood development and to enable them to develop and express ideas they have about their neighbourhood as well as other parts of their lives. This raises the question how participation is defined within the project and whether all people involved have the same understanding of participation.

Project partners within the project come from different disciplines, such as social sciences, community work, planning and computer sciences. Participation is understood in different ways within those disciplines. This paper will focus on the understandings of social sciences/community workers and planners. Computer sciences are excluded within the discussion of this paper as their work within the project refers to different parts of the project and their participative work is more related to the joint development of concrete technical ideas.

As stated above, it can be said that community workers come from the “social“ or “process” side to participation, while planners come from the more results-oriented “planning” or “efficiency” side. In other words, community workers advocate fairness and empowerment while planners advocate effectivity, problem solving and better acceptance planning. The background of these two views will be explained below.

Participation has become an important objective (and buzz word) for planners through the communicative turn in planning (Healey 1997) and the trend towards (participatory) governance, which is partly related to the communicative turn (Grote & Gbikpi, 2002; Walk, 2008; Schmidt

2014). Both trends acknowledge that government in general and planners in particular need to involve further actors and stakeholders, such as the people planned for in order to achieve better results.

Within the strand of governance discussion related to planning it is argued that the state has become an actor among others or that at least its role has shifted to a coordinating and enabling role while it still provides the institutional framework for governance at the national and sub-national level (Jouve, 2005; Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006). Reasons that are cited for the emergence of governance are the 'overload' of government and the 'ungovernability' of modern societies, referring to the growing diversity of society and the increasing load of complex and conflicting demands and expectations placed on the state by the public, organised interests or other actors (Schmitter 2002; Peters & Pierre 2006). Thus, there is a shift from (hierarchical) government to governance.

There are high expectations of the shift towards governance: It is hoped that the application of more participatory governance arrangements or in other words participation processes can lead to more political legitimacy, regained trust into politics, higher responsiveness of politicians and higher satisfaction of citizens with political decisions (Geißel, 2008). Within the context of neighbourhood development there are also expectations that the local cohesion can be strengthened, the self-confidence, responsibility and social capital of residents can be increased and that planning becomes more needs-oriented as residents are asked for their needs, and that this will lead to a better acceptance of planning projects (Schmidt, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are also problems with the shift towards governance. One problem is that often governance structures are not legitimated through democratic elections or similar processes. This can lead to the selective participation of certain groups if there are no clear rules for participation (Haus & Heinelt, 2005; Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006). Another issue is that there can be a tendency towards the involvement of more vocal groups while weaker groups or minorities are disregarded. A further criticism is that governance arrangements are often not capable of acting as they are not legitimised for action, but are only structures for discussion and development of ideas (Jessop, 2002).

It has to be noted that the shift towards governance does not only mean more participation and inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making but that it includes also a more economic approach of planning. This can include a focus on the competitiveness of the city or city region, (public-private) partnerships for previously public tasks or deregulation. The participative and economic trends can go together as improved planning or decision-making can improve or secure a quality of life that enhances the competitiveness, and as deregulation and devolution can mean more responsibility on the local level (Brenner, 2002; McGuirk, 2005). Therefore there is a risk that community participation and engagement replace tasks of the welfare state (Strube et al., 2015; Knopp, 2015).

Many of the governance processes on the local level – and in particular within socially integrative planning – seek to tackle the problems of governance by attempting to specifically include less vocal groups and by emphasising the high importance of participation through residents for the joint problem solution. Sometimes democratic legitimisation is given through the possibility to vote for neighbourhood representatives. However, the crucial question for each governance network is how the objective of broad participation can be brought together with the capacity to act, as mostly the participation processes are concerned with concrete problems or concepts that have to be solved or developed (Schmidt, 2014, p. 115).

In summary, it can be said that participation for planners means to include residents and other actors into the process of planning, in order to achieve better solutions, higher legitimation and also a smoother process of planning (because of less opposition) (Haus & Heinelt, 2005; Schmidt 2014).

For community workers, in contrast, participation is less about solving problems, but more about empowering and enabling people to take part in social life (Straßburger & Rieger 2014; Strube et al., 2015; Rübler & Stiel, 2015). Participation does not mean to involve people in certain topics as a professional; rather participation is thought as a qualifying activity that enables participants to strengthen social as well as political competences which in turn enables them to articulate their objectives and to take part in decision-making. Through this participation has an integrative effect (Strube et al., 2015).

At the same time, participation is not only the activity of enabling and empowering people, but it is also the act of taking part in social life and decisions. It is an act of the individual; the act of participation makes it possible to influence results and to contribute to social and political processes concerning the own life (Straßburger & Rieger, 2014).

Therefore, for community workers and other social professions participation is about capacity building and processes where participants learn to reflect and to represent their own interests. It stands for social affiliation and inclusion in crucial areas of life (Strube et al., 2015). Participation in this sense does not start with a problem which needs to be resolved and where all stakeholders concerned need to be involved in decision-making, but it starts with the involvement in social and political life and the needs and objectives of the individual. Thus, when looking at neighbourhood development and urban planning, community workers support residents to articulate their ideas and needs. They take an emancipatory approach (FH Nordwestschweiz, 2015).

In summary, it can be said that for community workers participation is integration into social life, while for planners participation refers to joint problem solving and the involvement of the community and other actors into certain topics. The different understandings of planners and community workers explain the problem of the "effectivity trap" (Munsch, 2005). The effectivity trap means that results-oriented participation processes working towards problem resolution can overburden some participants, particularly those not used to expressing their own opinion, so that they back out of those processes. Therefore participation processes need to be more adapted towards the participants, meet them at their situation, and be less middle-class focused. Thus, the processes need to have further objectives, such as social exchange and integration and not only concentrate on problems and their solution (Munsch, 2005). This refers back to the question how broad participation can be brought together with the capacity to act and is the reason why the project QuartiersNETZ seeks to bring together both sides of participation, the more results-oriented and the more socially and process oriented.

3 The project QuartiersNETZ

3.1 Older people as co-producers of neighbourhood networks

The project QuartiersNETZ develops "real" and "digital" networks within neighbourhood precincts and within these networks ideas about how the quality of life and social networks can be improved within the neighbourhood. The development and the testing of ideas is undertaken in a participative manner; that means researchers, practitioners and residents work together. The goal of these networks is to support a self-determined life for (older) residents within the neighbourhood for as long as possible and to facilitate the cooperation and participation of local residents and stakeholders. The term "real" network refers to concrete cooperation and participation structures in the actual neighbourhoods (the four case study areas), while the term "digital" network refers to more technical structures such as a digital platform.

The full title of the project is "Older people as (co-)producers of neighbourhood networks in the Ruhr area". This title already expresses the importance attached to participation and cooperation within the project. Particularly for the more technical innovations of the project, the concept of older people as co-producers is central and innovative in the sense that it shows the desire to switch from the acceptance paradigm to the participation paradigm (Sorgalla et al., 2015). The leading thought is to not only gather opinions or information, but to let people reach their own ideas and decisions. Similarly, within the real networks the involvement of older people is aimed to make them participants and co-producers rather than only voters and commentators on ideas and events within the neighbourhood.

As the project is funded within the funding priority area "Health and service regions of tomorrow" another important topic is how health services as well as other local services can be improved and interlinked and also how health or quality of life can be improved or maintained. This also includes the idea of shaping the demographic change occurring in the Ruhr area and to support the structural change towards an innovative service region.

The project has a number of sub-projects or sub-topics which include the participative development of: a) a digital platform, b) ideas for adapting technical devices for impairments of older people and

the adaptation of selected devices, c) a training and guidance concept which qualifies citizens to understand and explain technology, d) business models and service provider networks, and e) participation models. As these sub-projects are quite diverse project partners are from a number of different fields and backgrounds, including computer sciences, social sciences, gerontology and geragogy as well as research, care services, municipal government and individual businesses.

As a case study for the Ruhr area the city of Gelsenkirchen has been selected because it is a city that is greatly influenced by ongoing structural change and has experienced developments that are typical for the whole region. Both the Ruhr area and Gelsenkirchen have experienced a strong socio-economic structural change for decades and are particularly influenced by an ongoing decline in jobs as well as changes in the job market from a more industrial to a more service-oriented labour market. This has led to high unemployment and migration loss and thus a shrinking number of inhabitants which has exacerbated other effects of demographic change, such as the growing proportion of older people. It can be said that the Ruhr area is “ahead” of other regions regarding the effects of demographic change and therefore a good case study for developing and testing approaches towards supporting a self-determined life for older people within the own neighbourhood (Fachinger et al., 2015). Moreover, the city of Gelsenkirchen has adopted a master plan for senior citizens in 2005, which established an integrated approach towards senior citizens policy, and has since established corresponding coordination and cooperation structures.

Within the city of Gelsenkirchen four neighbourhood precincts have been selected as case studies. Local actors from the precincts were asked to apply for taking part in the project so that a certain interest in the project is given and there is already some interest in cooperation and working together for the precinct. From the application neighbourhoods were chosen that differ from each other with regard to population structure, building structure and other parameters. This was done to understand the importance of different prerequisites and what this means for participation processes. By working in differing neighbourhoods the need for different approaches in different circumstances can be highlighted, but it is also possible to find out whether some approaches are likely to be universally valid. Furthermore, results are more likely to be relevant for other cities when different types of neighbourhoods are considered.

Table 1 gives an overview of some of the characteristics and differences of the precincts. Already the number of residents differs to a relatively large extent, as the largest precinct has around 19,700 residents, whereas the smallest one has only around 4,200 residents. In the two larger precincts the percentage of people with a migration background is also higher with 37 % and 34 % respectively, in comparison to 11 % and 12 % in the other two precincts. The percentage of people aged 65 and older lies between 18 % and 29 %. The net migration loss between the ten years of 2003 and 2013 loss lies between 3% and 10 %. Differences of existing cooperation structures and relevant topics will be described below in the section on the steps and insights of the project.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of the case studies

	Precinct 1	Precinct 2	Precinct 3	Precinct 4
Population	19,700	13,600	8,900	4,200
Population density (people/km ²)	6,486	4,233	1,671	1,843
Percentage of people aged 65 and older	18 %	22 %	29 %	26 %
Migration net loss between 2003 and 2013	-3 %	-10 %	-3 %	-4 %
Percentage of people with migration background	37 %	34 %	11 %	12 %
Percentage of unemployed	15 %	13 %	4 %	5 %

Percentage of people receiving transfer payments	27 %	23 %	6 %	7 %
Percentage of people living less than 500m away from open space that is at least 0.5 ha	37 %	74 %	86 %	91 %
Dwelling vacancy rates	11 %	10 %	4 %	5 %

Source: Own calculations based on City of Gelsenkirchen

3.2 Participation models

This paper focuses on the participation process and the participation models which will be one result of the QuartiersNETZ project. The participation models are thought to facilitate the development of participation processes within neighbourhoods and precincts, similar to a field manual. They will include insights from the project regarding the incorporation of resources, potentials and knowledge of older people (and other actors), the initiation of self-organisation as well as the development of democratic processes within the precincts. This includes the establishment of networks, direct democratic structures as well as a connection between the residents and political and administrative structures. The models will present ideas and approaches according to the different conditions and requirements within the different types of neighbourhoods. Naturally, it will be difficult to generalise from the four case studies, but it is hoped that some useful rules of action can be highlighted from the work in the case studies, particularly in comparison to the experiences of similar projects.

To identify the basic principles for the participation models, participation structures are implemented within the case study neighbourhoods and participative processes initiated. The establishment of these processes will be described in the section below. Mainly, the content of the participation process will concentrate on neighbourhood development and structures that enable people of different age groups to live well in a neighbourhood precinct and to stay there as they grow older. Further topics may be included at a later point in time as will be the development of the democratic structures.

For the project QuartiersNETZ, discussions about problems with ageing and how technology could help and what kinds of services are needed would be particularly interesting. These topics may be introduced through the city-wide working groups described below or may need to be introduced into the precincts by project members over the course of the project. Possibilities include working groups at the neighbourhood conferences as well as focus groups or individual discussions with self-selected participants. How this will be handled will be decided over the course of the coming months and approaches are likely to differ for the different sub-projects.

The neighbourhood level offers the opportunity to ask the residents for their day-to-day expertise of living in their neighbourhood as well as their opinion and to acknowledge that they are experts of their precinct. The older residents are encouraged to develop ideas, start activities and think about what they need within their neighbourhoods and particularly what services they need to maintain their health and well-being, and how these services and their providers could be integrated into the neighbourhood and possibly also linked with each other.

The support of the neighbourhood networks and participation processes through technology, such as the digital platform or the improved handling of devices, is thought to support participation in social life and to prevent tendencies of (self) exclusion. Therefore their role usage will also be included into the participation models.

A crucial element of the participation models will be to bring together the two sides of participation in the sense of participation for integration and empowerment and participation for neighbourhood development (projects), as discussed above. While the latter is more results-oriented and concerned with (planned) projects, the former is more concerned with facilitating social integration and supporting self-organisation. Both forms of participation are necessary and have their merit but are often unconnected and particularly the participation for integration and empowerment does not exist very often within precincts. The challenge will be to bring actors of both forms of

participation, such as residents, community workers, service providers, municipal staff and politicians together.

4 First steps and insights of QuartiersNETZ

4.1 Establishment of participation structures

As described previously, participation structures have been established in the four case study areas in order to start participation and empowering processes and to find out desires and demands of older residents regarding their neighbourhood. The concept of older people as co-producers is also present within those processes. The processes taking place in the precincts over the project duration will provide the basis for the participation models.

As a first step “neighbourhood conferences” have been established in the four precincts. These conferences take place every three months and participants discuss self-selected topics and develop actions and activities. For the opening neighbourhood conference an official invitation from the mayor has been sent to all residents aged 50 and older. To motivate people to come to the event there have been additional efforts of approaching people within their networks and through multipliers for example within the migrant communities.

The precincts are at different stages with the conferences. While in precinct 1 the conferences have already been established three years ago in the context of another project, the other precincts have started in September 2014, March 2015 and May 2015 respectively. Reasons for this are the differences in already existing cooperation and participation structures and the related work to start those structures and to get local actors on board for the conferences. The conferences in precinct 1 have also been re-established and reorganised with a conference which doubled as a new start and an interim conclusion of the results that had already been achieved.

The neighbourhood conferences are about developing ideas and activities for the respective precinct. At the opening event ideas for and issues within the neighbourhood are gathered from the participants and in the following events working groups are established out of the collected topics which take care of the ideas and identified problems. It needs to be emphasised that there is no funding available from the project for activities so that the participants are required to think about what they can do, how they may get others to take needed actions and how they could get access to funding sources. They are supported by professionals within their working groups but they decide about the topics and activities that are undertaken.

In most of the conferences topics centre around issues like security, cleanliness, traffic, green spaces and housing. Topics that are not related to the urban and social situation of the precinct have not come up yet, but may be addressed with time.

The neighbourhood conferences are organised and undertaken by one of the project partners “Generationennetz” (generation network) which is a network of several city-wide organisations, including the city of Gelsenkirchen itself. The advantage of this is that the Generationennetz is already organised locally and knows many of the relevant local actors and, what is even more important, the actors also know the Generationennetz and know that they will stay and be available even when the project will be completed. This enhances trust into the project and improves the probability of enduring structures and processes. However, with the termination of the project funding for these local structures of the Generationennetz will decrease so that it is crucial to develop self-supporting structures which reinforce the developed activities and structures.

One crucial point is that the community involvement remains voluntary and that no one should feel obliged to take part. However, another central element is to avoid the effectivity trap and the reproduction of social disparities and to enable and encourage groups and people who may not be used to participate and express their opinion to take part in decision-making. This means to persist in inviting people to the processes and to develop and implement suitable enabling structures and low-threshold participation methods.

To reach out to certain groups that often do not take part in participation processes because of different barriers (Strube et al. 2015), a broad range of participation methods as well as specific invitation formats will be used. Apart from the neighbourhood conferences it is thus planned to develop further events and formats within the precincts in order to reach people who do not feel

comfortable with larger groups or “talking events”. These formats will include events where being there or doing activities is the main requirement so that connections between people can form and no pressure for further participation exists. Those events are thought to enable people who would normally not come to participation events to make first experiences with these events and to integrate them into the process. What those formats and events will look like will be developed together with already participating residents and multipliers.

For further events and workshops of the project invitations will also be disseminated via medical practices, pharmacies, care services, self-help groups and other local organisations. To reach people with low or no knowledge of German, invitation letters will be translated into the most common foreign languages and where possible translators will be at some of the events. Additionally migrant groups and organisations will be approached and asked to be part of the process.

To enable households with low income to take part, the events will be held at central locations within the precinct so that no travel expenses occur and the locations are easy to reach. To reach less mobile people it is considered to offer transportation services. Outreach work and events that are held at already existing venues and groups are also considered. The experiences with the participation methods and enabling structures will also be part of the participation models.

Another strand of participation are the already mentioned four city-wide working groups which refer to four of the sub-projects. The groups discuss ideas for the digital platform, interaction and communication media, the training concept and the business and participation models. Officially, these groups meet only every six months, although some of them self-organise interim meetings. The groups are a form of advisory and idea-developing groups with participants including citizens, service providers, municipal staff and further relevant actors, such as relevant associations and organisations. As an example the working group on the participation models – which is partly combined with the group on business models for service providers – has so far discussed how more people can be reached in the precincts, what participation methods and activities would be useful for reaching “difficult-to-reach” groups and how networking between the different service providers can be initiated and organised. The developed ideas will be implemented and tested within the neighbourhoods. The dissemination of the ideas will be initiated through group or neighbourhood “ambassadors”. The exact workings of this will be developed over the next meetings of the groups and the neighbourhood conferences.

When dealing with participation structures it is also important to understand that some people may use these structures for their own goals and objectives. This is not necessarily a bad thing as their goals may help the precinct as well, but it is necessary that there are some neutral actors without self-interest in the precinct which can coordinate the process and pay attention that every actor in the precinct has the same right to be heard and the same opportunity to express their opinion. One example of an actor with self-interest is for instance a housing association, but also a municipal planner who has planned something within the precinct and wants to get acceptance for his or her ideas. Here, the involvement of those actors in participation processes and the execution of how they present their ideas and how others are allowed to comment on this is crucial. Someone needs to watch that the processes and structures are not misused and that especially actors or residents who are not used to play a part within those processes and to express their opinion are empowered and enabled to do exactly this. This is one of the tasks of the Generationennetz, but also of the people that already participate in the project and processes. How this is and can be handled will be one of the topics of the participation models.

4.2 Networks and participation structures within the case studies

As described above, the precincts were selected because of their differences in order to understand the importance of different prerequisites and what this means for participation processes. It can already be seen that different topics are important in the different neighbourhoods and that diverse actors are involved in the local social life, participation, local supply, community work etc. Naturally, it is not possible to generalise from one neighbourhood or even four neighbourhoods how local actors will deal with certain problems and participation and empowerment. However, the

differences between the case studies may be able to show some specifics of the individual case and similarities may show problems and reactions that are similar in most neighbourhoods.

The precincts do have different issues and topics, even though they are all occupied with the challenges of the ageing process as well as service provision. In one precinct the main issue is that no venue exists where residents can meet or organise groups, so one of the first steps is to organise such a venue. In another precinct a strong network of citizens exists who have come together to improve the quality of life within their precinct, collect ideas of other residents and to organise neighbourhood activities so that this network builds an important base for the project. For a third precinct, integration is an important topic because a large part of the residents have a migration background and not all of them know German.

Differences exist also regarding the actors that are already active within the precinct. In one of the smaller precincts there is a large network of citizens already organised in different institutions, such as the local group of the social democratic party, the local union, the local group of the Workers Welfare Organisation and the sports club. These are mostly the same people and they form a group that is interested in the improvement of the neighbourhood and willing to take actions and personal responsibility. While this is a valuable virtue for the neighbourhood and helps to get things moving it is also important to keep in mind to include further residents into the process who are not organised within the already existing networks and who may not be as strong in debate.

One of the larger precincts has already a history of participation processes, on the one hand through a preceding research project trying to establish participation processes on the quality of life for older residents within the precinct (Rübler et al., 2015), on the other hand through the federal support program “Soziale Stadt”, as a socially integrative planning program. Therefore, a number of activities exist already and there is some funding for construction projects which have already been started or are planned. There is also a neighbourhood development office within the precinct which organises projects and participation processes for the support program. However, even though there is a history of participation processes, it seems that only a certain group of the local residents have been activated and that it is necessary to introduce further formats and events to reach and include further groups. Also, it will be necessary to re-motivate some of the residents or local business people who have backed out of the participation process at some point. A process which is more self-organised and bottom-up may be helpful to develop more enduring structures and to include more groups and residents.

Different objectives and time frames for participation also exist between the groups relevant to the neighbourhood. Residents tend to be less focused on time and fast results and more on developing ideas for the precinct as well as enduring structures. Business and service providers, in contrast, are more likely to watch the time spent on participation processes and to aim for (quick) results as they do not want and cannot afford too much “non-productive” time. Of course there are also exceptions to the rule, but during the first working groups and neighbourhood conferences these differences have come up relatively clearly with some of the professionals stating that the meetings were not enough results-oriented for them or that they would not be able to come to “too” frequent meetings. The project QuartiersNETZ has therefore started to develop different formats for the different groups in order to do justice to their different needs and to ensure that they do not leave the process. Specific meetings for service providers have been set up in which the topic of networking between them is discussed and which are more results-oriented. These meetings are also incorporated into the sub-project concerned with the development of business models. At the same time the neighbourhood conferences and other participation formats with their focus on inclusion remain a crucial element to support the empowerment of residents and their ability to influence the future of their neighbourhood. The results of the “business meetings” and their participants will be brought back to the neighbourhood conferences at some point, to avoid the development of two or more separate structures and to develop joint ideas for the precinct.

Overall, the participation processes within the neighbourhoods had a good start with many people interested in participating and a good turn-out for the first conferences. The coming months will show whether participants will stay, what activities will be developed, whether “difficult-to-reach” groups can be reached, what formats need to be developed, and how those processes can be integrated into municipal structures.

5 Conclusions

The literature review has shown that different understandings of participation exist within different fields. This can also be experienced on the local level, where some local actors are focused on the inclusion of residents and the corresponding process, while other actors are more focused on the efficiency and results of participation processes. Each of those actors has their reasons for their focus. For example sometimes results are necessitated within a certain time frame so that inclusion efforts may take too long for the process in question. However, this does not mean that inclusion efforts can be dropped. Rather this means that inclusion efforts are a crucial basis for participation work and need to be implemented in all precincts of a city. If participation processes for inclusion already exist, participation processes that are seeking results will be able to include more residents and avoid that only the well-organised groups and “usual suspects” will be able to participate. This means time and effort need to be put in for the “inclusion and empowerment” process so that when results-oriented processes arise the residents are already “prepared” for the corresponding participation process. However, this also means that people will be ready to express their opinions and develop their own ideas and participation will occur bottom-up, something that planners may not be used to, but that is crucial for the democratic process of urban development. In any case, both sides of participation are necessary and need to be organised within a precinct.

It will be one of the challenges for QuartiersNETZ to develop processes for both kinds of participation and to interconnect them with each other. It will be necessary to include a number of different groups into the project (and the precinct) to achieve this. For example the municipal administration will need to be brought into the project more strongly, as the ideas and activities developed within the neighbourhood conferences will need to be coordinated with municipal projects and vice versa. This will also necessitate bringing together the more results-oriented thinking of the administration with the more inclusion-oriented thinking of the participation processes, or in other words bringing community workers together with planners.

This challenge will also be one important element of the participation models. The models will aim to make statements as to how the two sides of participation in the sense of participation for integration and empowerment and participation for neighbourhood development (projects) can be brought together. The integration of the neighbourhood participation processes into the local democratic structures will also need to take into account the different understandings of participation.

The project QuartiersNETZ has started to develop different formats for different groups as well as for different topics, in order to do justice to the different needs. For instance, more results-oriented events are offered for service providers. By having groups with a focus on efficiency and results and groups with the focus on inclusion it may be possible to do justice to both sides of the participation conundrum. However, it remains to be seen how well the consolidation of the groups and topics at a later point in time works.

The participation conundrum also shows how important the development of sustainable structures is that continue when the project and its funding is terminated. Without the coordination through the project there may be no actors that maintain the focus on the inclusion side of participation and the results-oriented participation may predominate again. However, exactly this focus on inclusion may be the key to the sustainability of structures because once residents are empowered and involved, they are more likely to self-organise and demand their inclusion. Similarly, when the networking and joint business models are useful for service providers they will self-organise and maintain the network.

Yet, this leaves two questions: 1) how can neighbourhood networks be organised, established and maintained without project funding (within the budget of a municipality)? and 2) is it possible to completely leave the precinct on its own or is it necessary to maintain some professional support? Currently, we would argue that it is necessary to maintain some professional support which can organise the relevant contacts to government and other actors and which can ensure that the inclusion of all population groups is still a relevant goal within the precinct and which can act as a “neutral” actor and a network node and multiplier. Similarly, the establishment and organisation of neighbourhood networks is possible without targeted project funding – as the city of Gelsenkirchen has shown with their already existing structures – but needs the commitment of the municipality

(or other actors) to put in at least *some* effort and staff in order to initiate and support such processes. How exactly this can be organised will be another element of the participation models at the end of the project.

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6 References

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