

Beyond the usual suspects: Uncovering the network of civic and private sector actors in Munich's urban development.

Author 1 Agnes Förster¹, Author 2 Carina Engler², Author 3 Stephanie Fabich²,
Author 4 Sarah Lechner², Author 5 Theresa Ramisch², Author 6 Susanne Schöpf²

¹A1 Munich University of Technology (Institute of Urban Development), foerster@tum.de

²A2 & A3 & A4 & A5 & A6 Munich University of Technology (Institute of Urban Development)

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Urban development more and more depends on the cooperation of public authorities with civic and private sector actors. Public budgets are scarce, the tasks at hand and the related investment volume are immense. Planning as tabula rasa without concerned stakeholders is a rare exception. As a consequence, politicians, users, neighbours increasingly call for serious and effective involvement and participation.

When setting up citizen participation processes one key question is: Who shall be addressed? To what issues and in what areas of the city? Beyond the usual suspects, we often find a fragmented landscape of various actors that – explicitly or implicitly – involve themselves in urban development. The paper presents the results of a research project investigating the fragmented landscape of actors in the city of Munich, Germany. Three research questions guide the empirical work: 1) What does the civic and private sector actors' commitment to the urban development of the city look like? 2) What shared activities and shared spatial and thematic interests potentially bind these actors? 3) What is the correlation between the civic and private sector commitment and the activities of public authorities?

The empirical research is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of public communication. The collected data is analysed in respect to actors, spaces and issues. A quantitative network analysis reveals the linkages between the divers range of actors. The results are visualised in maps and diagrams and will be discussed in a focus-group workshop with key actors of the revealed network.

1. Introduction

Urban planning is a social activity, done by people for people. In that kind of people's business a broad range of actors is to be involved and addressed: users, providers, property owners, investors, public authorities, politicians and all kind of other stakeholders in the public, civic or private sphere. From the planner's view, these different actors can be conceived in a multi-level perspective: Planning actors encompass individual planners, teams of planners and planning organisations. In most cases different planning organisations interact and cooperate in a constellation that is embedded in an institutional context. This multi-layered 'planning world' is part of the 'life world', where the 'arena' of stakeholders, political bodies and decision-makers and the public shape the 'agenda' of planning issues, interests and topics (Förster 2014) (figure 1).

In a very basic understanding, the activity of planning can be conceived as a cycle of different process steps that involve both, the planning and the life world. The planning model of the third generation according to Schönwandt (2002) (Figure 2) incorporates a systemic perspective that purposefully avoids any idea of 'rational planning'. The limitations of perception, reasoning, communication and action are an integral part of that model. From a systemic perspective, system processes and system structures mutually influence one another. Consequently, any planning activity has an effect on the performing actors and the target groups that shall be addressed. Conversely the mind-set, interests, skills and resources, organisational structures and social networks of the actors involved shape the scope of planning actions.

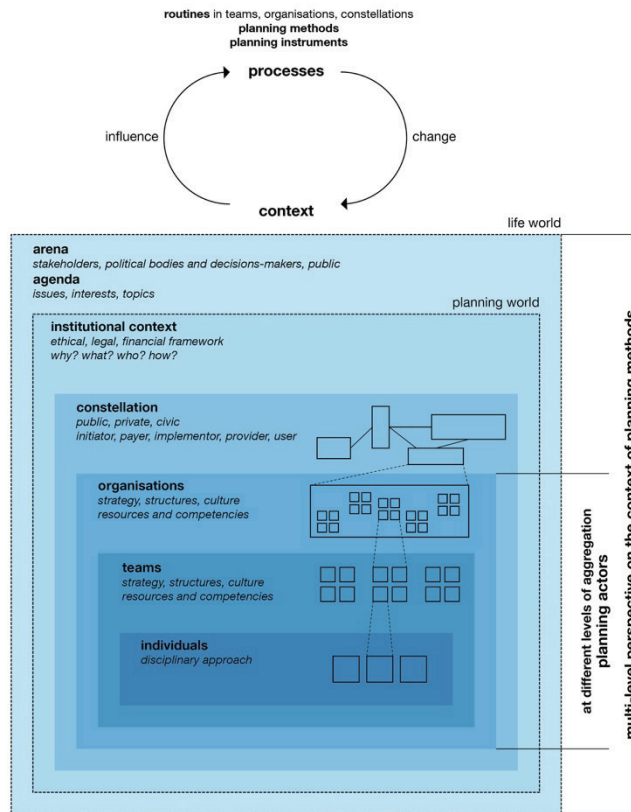


Figure 1. A multi-layer perspective on the actors involved in planning (Förster 2014).

In planning research and practice, big efforts have been undertaken to improve planning techniques and procedures. But there is only little knowledge on the perspective and motivation of the actors involved. Any planning routines, planning methods and planning instruments are only as good as capable and dedicated actors – be they planners, politicians, citizens, users, operators, investors et cetera.

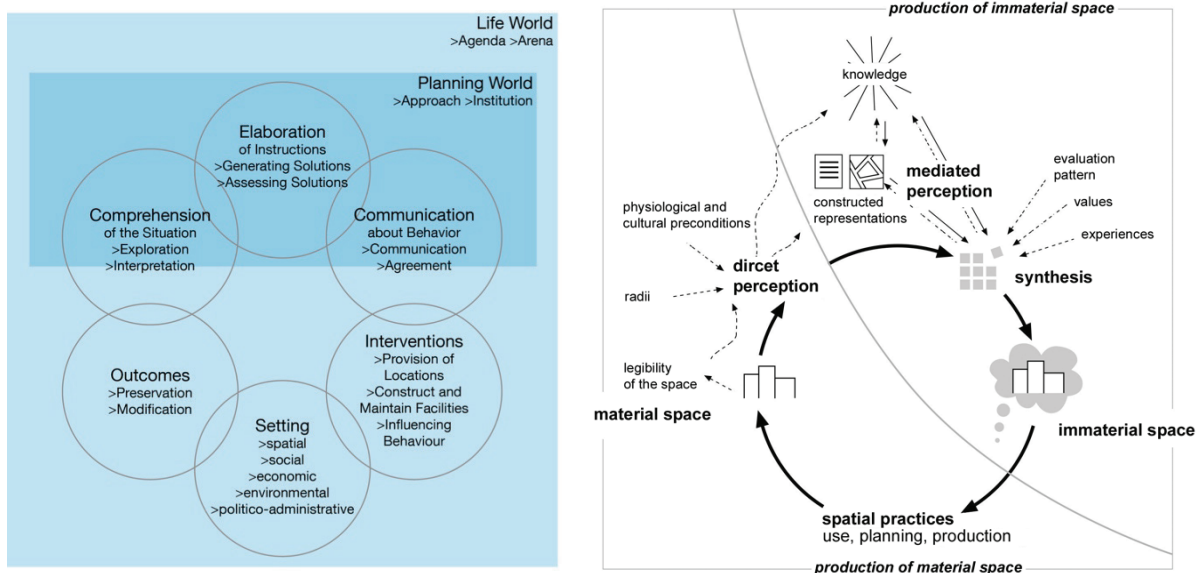


Figure 2. Planning cycle according to Schönwandt (2002) (left) and Petritin's concept of the production of space (2008) (right).

This paper follows an actor centred research perspective. It focuses on the public commitment and involvement of civic, private and public sector actors in urban development. Specially, the paper

focuses on the public debate on the city – that has to be distinguished from actions taken in the city. From the systemic perspective, planning activities in the city and the way of talking about the city are interrelated. The ‘planning cycle’ can be interpreted to the circular ‘production of space’ according to Petrin (2008) (figure 2). The production of immaterial space by perception, mind-sets and discourse prepares the production of material space when spatial practices such as use, planning and production take place. Correspondingly, urban planning is no technical endeavour that can be conceived and implemented according to a target-means matrix but it is inseparably linked to the city and urban society as a whole – and to its public discourse. With the focus on the debate on the city the paper investigates the role – the potentials as well as limitations – of public discussion and reflection on urban development and planning.

In Germany, we see a growing awareness and demand for citizen participation in all kinds of urban and regional planning projects in recent years. Currently planning practitioners and researchers develop and evaluate new participation formats. At the same time, they have to recognize the limitations of activating new target groups to the public debate on urban development – beyond the usual suspects. In the German parliamentary democracy, citizens have only rarely the opportunity to make use of direct democracy instruments. Therefore civic, private and public organisations, associations, clubs and actions groups have an important moderating role in addressing the citizens and in shaping the public opinion.

The involvement and participation of civic and private sector actors in urban development can be understood as a resource for urban development and planning. Relevant actors come from different spheres such as environment protection, trade unions, professional organisations, trade associations, monument protection, education, youth groups et cetera. These very different organised actors show structures of interaction and cooperation that have gradually evolved over time and cannot be reproduced intentionally. These network-like structures serve as a capital for urban development. They facilitate the flow of information and provide for short links and direct communication among a broad range of stakeholders.

The Munich Case

‘Let’s talk about the city!’ This appeal could be heard at least 500 times within the last three years in the city of Munich. Invitations to public events were advertised on the Internet as well as in newspapers, flyers or on the radio. The estimated number of events spread by social media or word-of-mouth is much higher. In Munich, we are seeing a lively debate on urban development for many years now. On the one hand, this debate is the result of intended citizen participation around current urban development projects and programmes – planned and implemented by public authorities or private investors. On the other hand, the debate is the expression of publicly articulated comfort as well as discomfort in a continually growing and changing city.

The city of Munich is known for an active involvement of citizens in urban planning. The civic association ‘Münchner Diskussionsforum für Entwicklungsfragen e.V.’ was founded in the 1960s in opposition to the on-going transformation of Munich to a car-friendly city. Since then, the ‘Münchner Forum’ supports the public debate on current issues of the development of the city. Besides, there is a broad range of other associations and groups that raise their voice to issues of city development and planning. Today, this gradually grown ‘landscape of participation’ in Munich is facing the challenge of a strong and lasting population and job growth with all the related issues such as transport and social infrastructure, social integration, densification of existing neighbourhoods and enhancement of green areas. When trying to tackle these challenges in the public debate, urgent issues are:

1. How to get an overview over the fragmented landscape of participation?
2. What organised actors support a long-term perspective on urban development – beyond the ‘not in my backyard’ attitude?
3. How to use that knowledge to build up new coalitions and alliances for change?

This paper presents the intermediate results of an exploratory study investigating the fragmented landscape of actors in the city of Munich, Germany. The paper sets the focus on the empirical work with the methodology applied and the interim findings in respect to actors, spaces and issues. The results raise questions to further research on the ‘landscape of participation’ in Munich, to the methodological approach and to the implications for theory. With the presentation of an exploratory study in the early phase of a research project, the paper provides a first sketch that inevitably remains incomplete in many facets of theory and methodology.

2. Methodology of the empirical study

The aim of the empirical study is to reveal Munich’s ‘landscape of participation’ – that is defined as the public debate on the city including the actors involved with their structures of cooperation as well as the urban spaces, urban issues and urban projects that debate is related to. Three research questions guide the empirical work:

1. What does the civic and private sector actors’ commitment to the urban development of the city look like?
2. What shared activities and shared spatial and thematic interests potentially bind these actors?
3. What is the correlation between the civic and private sector commitment and the activities of public authorities?

The empirical research is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of public communication. The starting point is the identification of public events of communication such as panel discussions, workshops, excursions and exhibition events that reflect on the development of the city and region as a whole or on individual spaces, projects or issues within the city. These communicative events are collected ex post from a period of January 2012 to December 2014. In retrospect, all events were included that were detectable from an Internet search. As the personnel resources were limited, the survey was restricted to face-to-face communication and excluded all kinds of communication on the Internet and social media.

With that definition at hand, data was collected in relation to five dimensions of communicative events (figure 3). The first dimension relates to the actors such as initiators, hosts, people taking part in discussions, organisations providing the room for the activity or financing the event. Actors can be distinguished between civic, private and public – they operate as organised actors or individuals. The second dimension points to the format of the communicative event. Third, communicative activities are collected and analysed in relation to current urban development projects in the city. Fourth, the public debate has a spatial dimension when activities relate to distinct areas within the city from a very local to a district scale or beyond. The fifth dimension explores different issues of urban development that are debated on.

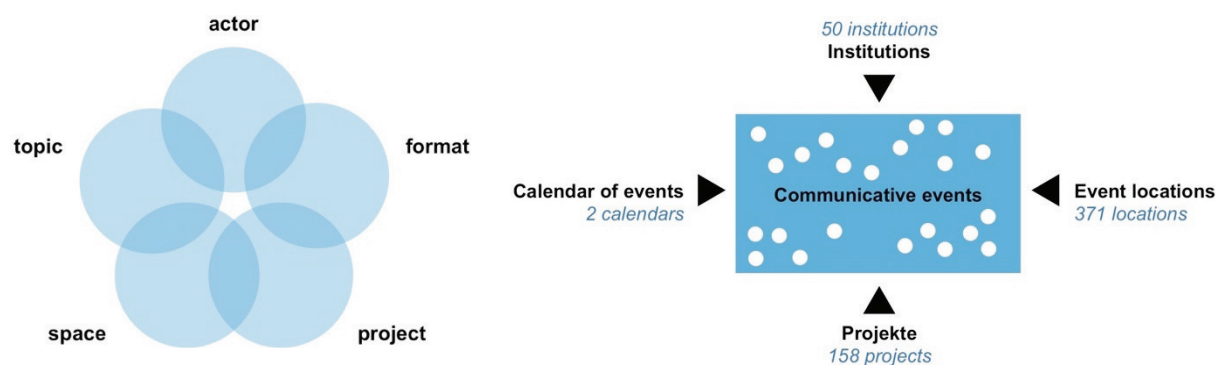


Figure 3. Five dimensions of communicative events (left) and research strategy for the collection of data (right).

These five dimensions shape the object of investigation and the collected database of this study. The overall population of communicative activities from 2012 to 2014 is unknown. In order to consider as many activities as possible within that time span, the research strategy built upon four perspectives: The internet search started from 50 institutions already known as participants in the public debate, considered 371 event locations, looked for 158 official projects within the city and investigated into two calendars of events (figure 3).

Starting from that basic definition and the research strategy, the first part of the study is based on a quantitative analysis of the collected data. Quantitative analysis is organised in five phases:

1. Basic content analysis to decide whether an activity is taken into consideration or not
2. Profound content analysis of the selected activities and feeding into an Excel database
3. Quantitative analysis in Excel, GIS, Matlab, Gephi and visualisation of the results
4. Qualitative evaluation of the quantitative results
5. Interpretation

The second part of the study was a qualitative focus group workshop. The actors identified in the quantitative research were invited to discuss, validate and complement the intermediate results. Visualisations were a key to stimulate the joint discussion among the participants. The research team got involved in the ‘landscape of participation’ itself. With the preliminary results at hand, the researchers provoked a lively debate among the participants.



Figure 3. Impressions of the focus-group workshop.

The look back on the last three years of activities was combined with a look into the future. How can the current involvement and commitment of the various actors be used to tackle the challenges of the growing city of Munich? In the workshop research had a positive, enabling effect for the actors involved. They sharpened their awareness for new linkages, synergies and coalitions within Munich’s ‘landscape of participation’.

3. Results

The Internet search identified 510 communicative events within the last three years that were fed into the database. 209 different actors organised these activities. Another 624 actors cooperated in these events as discussion partners, moderators or experts. The formats of the public communication are dominated by public discussions with 34 per cent, followed by excursions with 20 per cent, presentations with 19 per cent and exhibitions events with 13 per cent. Workshops as the most interactive format are applied only in 5 per cent of the events. Civic actors contribute to 49 per cent of all activities, private and public actors each to 34 per cent. More than two third of the communicative activities are not directly linked to a distinct project of urban development. This is equally true for public as well as for civic and private actors. The dataset is further analysed in relation to actors, spaces and topics the public debate points at. The exploratory empirical study focuses on pattern analysis within the quantitative dataset, an approach very different to a representative survey.

3.1 Actors

The first focus of the quantitative analysis is related to the actors involved in the public debate. The organising actors can be ranked by their amount of activity (figure 4). This ranking shows three main actors who organized the most of the public events: the municipality of Munich ('Landeshauptstadt München') with its different departments, the adult education centre ('Münchener Volkshochschule GmbH') and the civic association 'Münchener Diskussionsforum für Entwicklungsfragen e.V.'. The remaining actors have a much lower frequency of events.



Figure 4. Ranking of the most active actors.

A quantitative network analysis was applied to the collected database in order to reveal the structures of cooperation and communication of these actors. The actors are represented as nodes. The size of the nodes indicates the number of public events in which the actors took part. In the first step of the network analysis, the joint organisation of a communicative activity is interpreted as an edge between two actors. The thicker the line, the more events were organized by two actors. The network of the 209 organising actors – the 'producers' or 'makers' of the public debate – is shown in figure 5. The second step of the network analysis also incorporates the other 624 cooperating and participating actors (figure 6). In that network, the edges represent a joint participation of two actors in a public event.

The network of the 'makers' of the public debate can be read on three levels (figure 5): On level 1 the three main actors form the central cluster and are connected to each other. Each actor also possesses its own small cluster that links to further actors. The role and position of Munich's adult education centre is the result of the annual programme of 2014/15 with the focus on urban development issues. Despite the large number of organised events, it is rather weakly cross-linked within the network. The adult education centre tends to be a cosmos of its own. Level 2 comprises actors with fewer organized events – such as 'Stiftung Federkiel' or the 'Technische Universität München' – but that still operate close to and well connected to the central cluster. Beyond that, level 3 of the network shows 'satellites' around the central area. On this level we find very small networks of actors jointly organising public events and even actors that are not linked to any other actor at all. So in that network of the 'producers' we observe a tension between the main players in the centre – the 'usual suspects' – and a broad range of further actors that are only loosely or even not connected to that centre.

In contrast, the network of the cooperating and participating actors shows a very dense structure (figure 6). The participants that join the debate from politics, the media and also from outside Munich connect the different clusters of the organising network. So the different ‘makers’ of the debate involve the same addressees, be it decision-makers, experts or disseminators. These act as ‘connectors’ within the ‘landscape of participation’ and thus have an important role for the exchange of knowledge and the negotiation of different perceptions, concerns and interests.

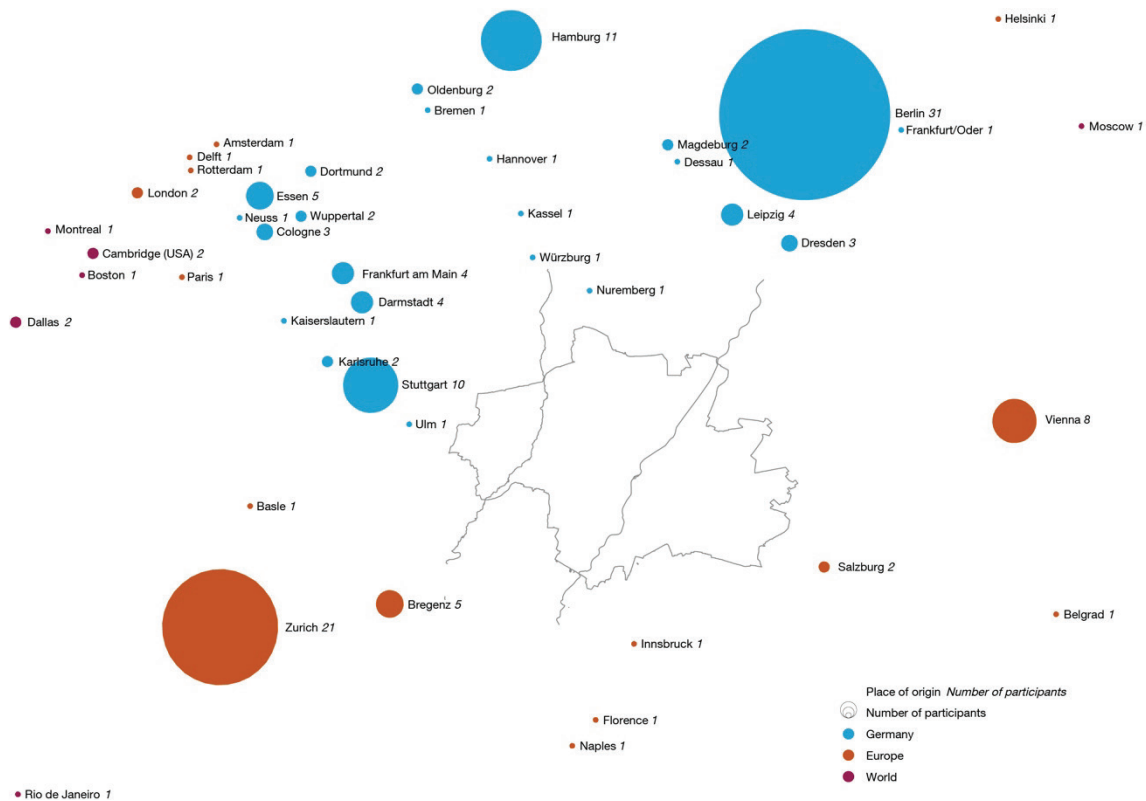


Figure 7. Actors involved in the public debate from outside Munich.

In a further step of the analysis we identified all contributors to the public debate that come from outside the City of Munich. We assume that external input is important for the quality of the dialogue and debate within a city. Otherwise, there is a risk of a ‘lock-in’ situation in the debate that hinders city planning from further development. The debate in Munich indeed shows a broad range of participants from other cities in Germany, Europe and even from all over the world (figure 7). The main focus of the cross-city exchange is on the city of Berlin as the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as on the neighbouring cities such as Zurich, Stuttgart, Bregenz and Vienna. In the public debate on the city actors in Munich look for expertise and best practices much more frequently within the German-speaking south, southwest and southeast including Switzerland and Austria than in the north and northwest of Germany.

In the focus-group workshop the research team confronted the participants with the results of the quantitative network analysis. It became evident that in many cases the self-perception of the actors differs considerably from the outside perception of the research findings. First, this reaction can be interpreted as the surprise effect when giving a systematic overview on the so far hidden landscape of participation and cooperation. Second, the gap in perception points to limitations in the dataset and analysis. This is the case for the activities of the 25 district committees within the city of Munich. Their regular meetings that are in principle open to the public were intentionally excluded from the research. However, in the self-perception of the political actors, these meetings provide for a constant discussion of local issues on urban development. Another limitation points to the availability of data. The ex post search includes only those communication events with information still available on the

Internet. We have to assume a lot of public events to be advertised by social media or flyers only – all these kinds of events are not represented in the dataset. Third, the difference between self-perception and the revealed ‘landscape of participation’ might indicate deficiencies in the communication strategy of each actor. This was exactly the discussion that was provoked in the workshop. Each actor began to reflect on its own position within the network and discussed the reasons of the gap in perception.

3.2 Spaces

The recorded events of the public debate are further analysed with regard to their spatial dimension. What spaces of the city is the public debate related to? In the public debate on urban development awareness might not be spread equally throughout all districts of the city. There might be hot spots and white spaces of the debate. The debate might even be very general and not point to any specific areas within the city. The spatial dimension of the debate is a key in order to assess the relation between the civic and private sector commitment and the activities of public authorities. It also helps to estimate the relation between the awareness and commitment for overall, strategic issues of the future development of the city and the need for action and implementation in specific urban situations.

In order to capture the spatial dimension of the debate, each communicative event was assessed in terms of the area within the city to which it is related to. The challenge was to map spatial references that in most cases have no administrative borders. Lots of communicative activities point to rather ‘emotional’ or ‘informal’ areas of the city that can hardly be described with a fixed outline. The awareness and public debate on these areas often refer to historical identities or emotional neighbourhoods that are hardly comprehensible for an outsider.

From the assessment of the individual event we built up a GIS database that allows for a spatial analysis with regards to actors, topics, formats and projects. This database comprises 120 different spatial shapes as the areas the public debate focused on within the last three years. These shapes refer to different spatial scales within the city. Some of the communicative events point to individual buildings or restricted areas with a definite address. Others refer to whole streets, formal and informal quarters, administrative districts as well as quite fuzzy areas with vague names such as “the edge of the city” or “East of Munich”.

The analysis reveals 215 of the 510 identified public events that point to the city as a whole. So there is a large debate on the city without any specific spatial reference. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as broad public interest in urban development beyond individual interests in particular areas. On the other hand, the overall debate might be too general – and maybe also too academic – and therefore miss sensitivity and awareness for distinct spatial situations within the city.

Figure 8 shows the overall spatial pattern of the public debate with reference to distinct areas within the city. The ‘creative quarter’ is a current urban transformation project that attracts the most public events. The relation between the city of Munich and its region or agglomeration is ranked number two. On the map we find numerous other events with reference to urban projects within the city. In total we recognize a lively debate in the districts adjacent to the inner city. In these areas we often observe spatial transformations processes caused by the constant growth of the city and the enlargement of central functions of the city center. Furthermore these areas have a high share of a long-established population that actively contributes to the public debate. In the north of the inner city we find three areas in close vicinity to one another: the art district, the creative quarter and the Olympic Park with its different facilities. Here, the map reveals potential for new spatial links and synergies in the public debate.

Another spatial focus relates to the Isar river, where a big renaturalization project has been realized within the last 10 years. In the inner city the regain of the riverside – today a car-dominated area – as public space for pedestrians and cyclists is a big issue. The growing city of Munich also shows clearly visible spatial dynamics in the outskirts. In the north, west and east big housing areas are going to be realized within the next 5 to 30 years.

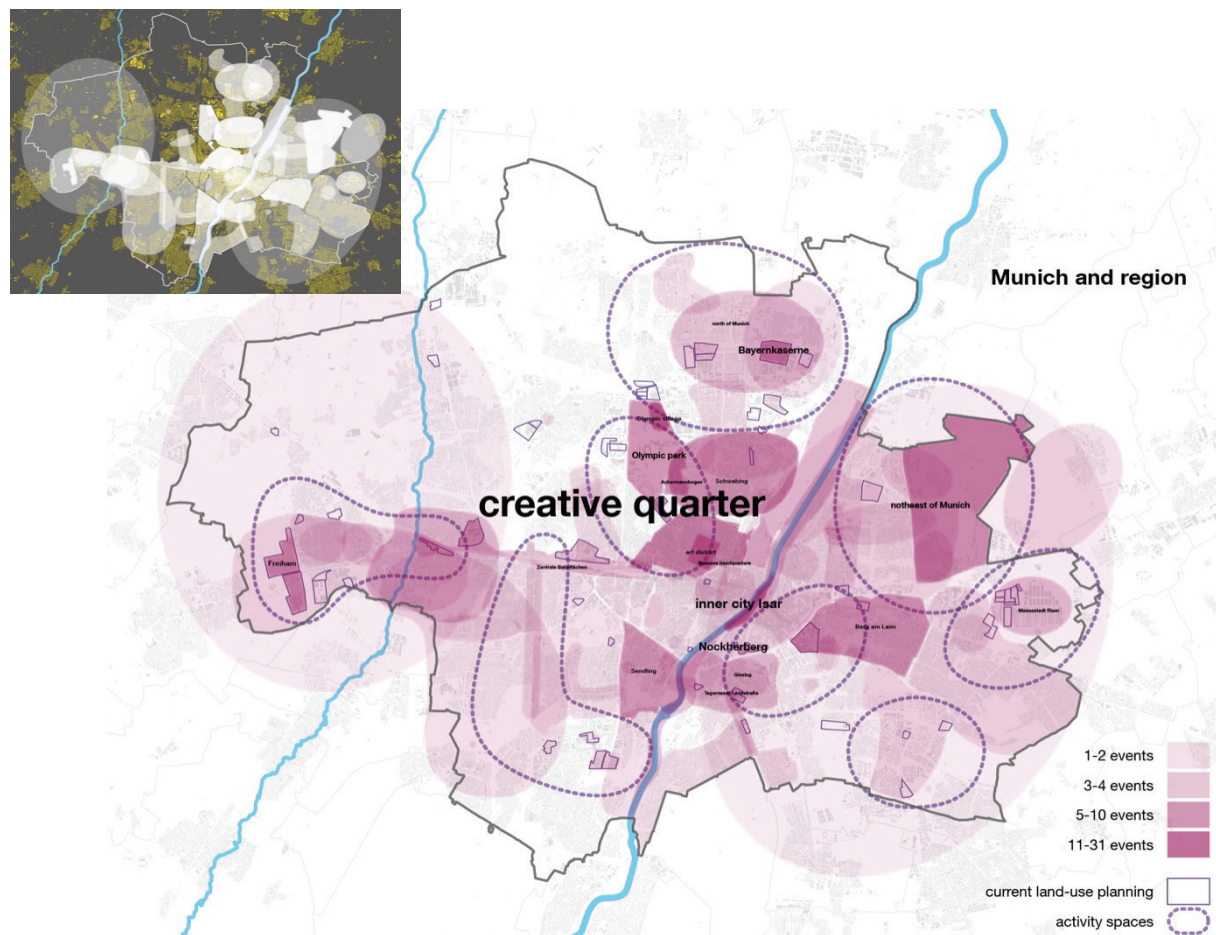


Figure 8. Spatial dimension of the discourse on the city of Munich.
Top left: Spaces that are excluded in the public debate.

The spatial analysis also reveals those areas of the city that are not talked about: the northwest, the south and southeast. These areas were the starting point for the discussion in the workshop: Why are some areas in the city not as interesting as others? Who takes care of the seemingly forgotten parts of the city? Especially in the southern part there seems to be a mismatch between the ongoing dynamics of spatial transformation and the limited awareness in the public debate. In the south, the banana shaped ‘activity space’ set by the urban development strategy ‘Munich Perspective’ (Thierstein et al. 2010) is almost empty.

The city of Munich is currently running numerous brownfield development projects of vacant barracks and industrial areas. At the same time, big urban expansion areas are on the way in the west and east. In order to breathe new life into these upcoming city quarters there is a need for constant involvement of civic, private and public actors. Instead, in these areas citizen participation is often limited to individual events. In many cases public awareness and interest get lost in the long-term transformation process. The lack of attention and care in these empty spaces raises the awareness that existing civic, private and public commitment in other areas of the city is an important resource that cannot be reproduced easily. Nevertheless, planners often feel that temporary users, action groups and local associations disturb and slow down city planning.

The participants of the workshop also discussed the relation between the residents’ identification with their neighborhood and their readiness and interest to participate in the public debate. In a growing and constantly transforming city, the feeling of belonging is a valuable good – especially for those residents who arrived only recently. In return city planners have to ask themselves what spatial scales shall be addressed in the public debate on the future development of the city in order to draw attention and commitment among the intended actors.

3.3 Topics

The quantitative analysis thirdly relates to the topics that are raised in the public debate. Based on the information available on the Internet, the communicative events of the database are analysed in respect to the issues involved. This qualitative content analysis reveals 22 different categories. Most events refer to two or even more categories at the same time. So the different issues of urban development are discussed in close relation to one another. City planning, housing and culture are the most frequently debated topics.

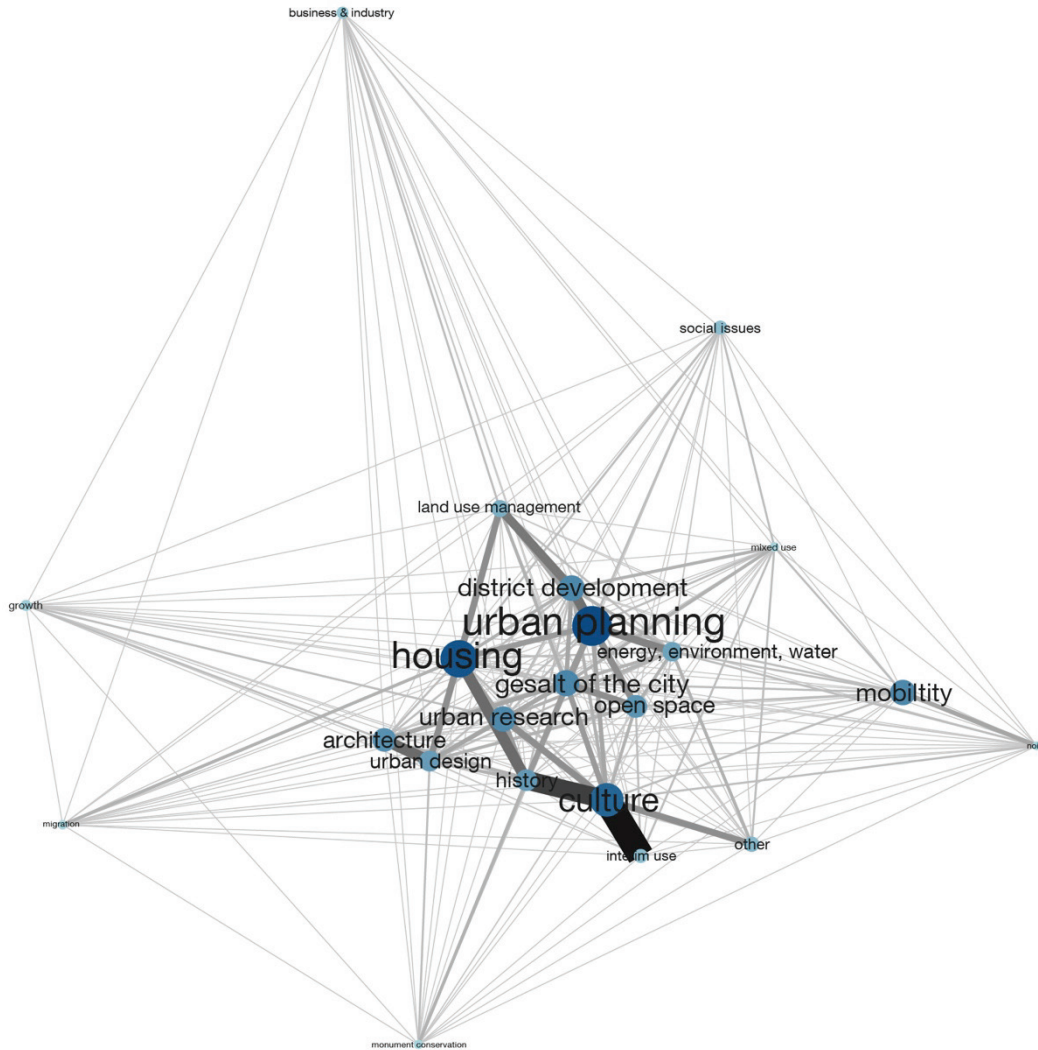


Figure 9. Network of topics talked about.

A quantitative network analysis shows the proximity and distance of the different topics in the public debate (figure 9). The size of the nodes indicates the number of communicative events that deal with a topic. The weight of the edges refers to the amount of events that combine two topics. The network reveals a core of about 12 particularly closely connects issues. The gestalt of the city is placed in the center of that core with an especially high degree of networking. Open spaces show an almost equally central position. So gestalt and open spaces are particularly intensely discussed in relation and dependency to a broad range of other important issues. In contrast functional topics such as mobility, social issues or business and industry are mostly discussed one-by-one. Here, from a thematic point of view, a less integrated perspective dominates the public debate. The rather isolated position within the thematic network is especially critical for the urgent issue of mobility. The development of the transport infrastructure in combination with the changing mobility demand is a crucial topic for the growing city-region of Munich. This issue demands for a debate that also integrates the spatial dimensions of housing and jobs at the spatial scale of the functional city-region.

According to the thematic network, the important issue of culture can be read in two ways. First, there is a strong link to history. This relates – amongst others – to the importance of Munich as a center for art and culture in the beginning of the 20th century that is still present in the self-image of the city today. On the other hand, there is a lively debate on the conditions of contemporary artists and cultural workers that desperately look for available working spaces in the city. Interim uses – so far only marginally offered within the city – are of considerable potential for the promotion of the arts and the creative economy in the Munich region. The analysis of the actors involved in each topic show that the issue of culture has the specific capacity to bind and activate a broad range of different actors beyond the ‘usual suspects’ (figure 10). The department of arts and culture of the city of Munich only ranks 8 in the list of the most active actors that debate on the issue of culture.

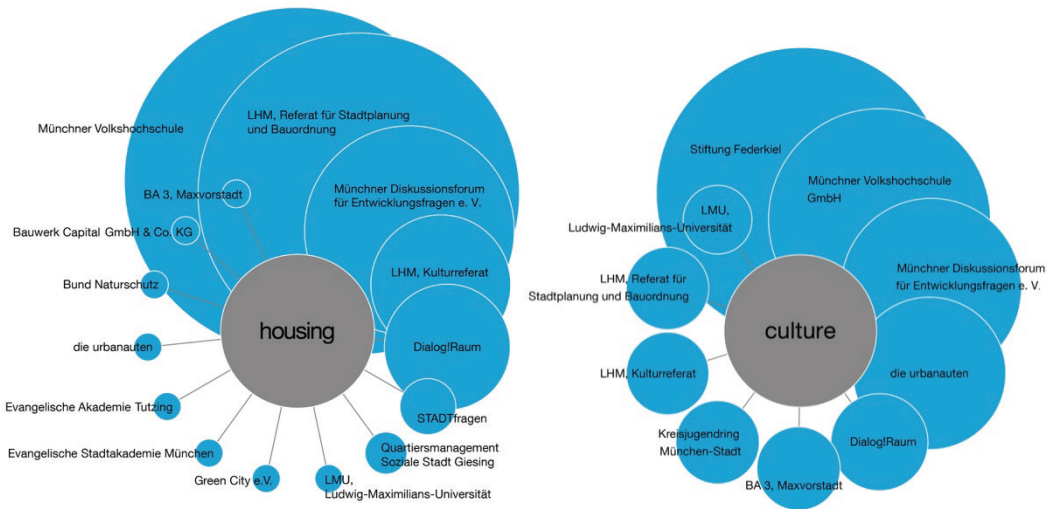


Figure 10. Actors related to topics in the public debate.

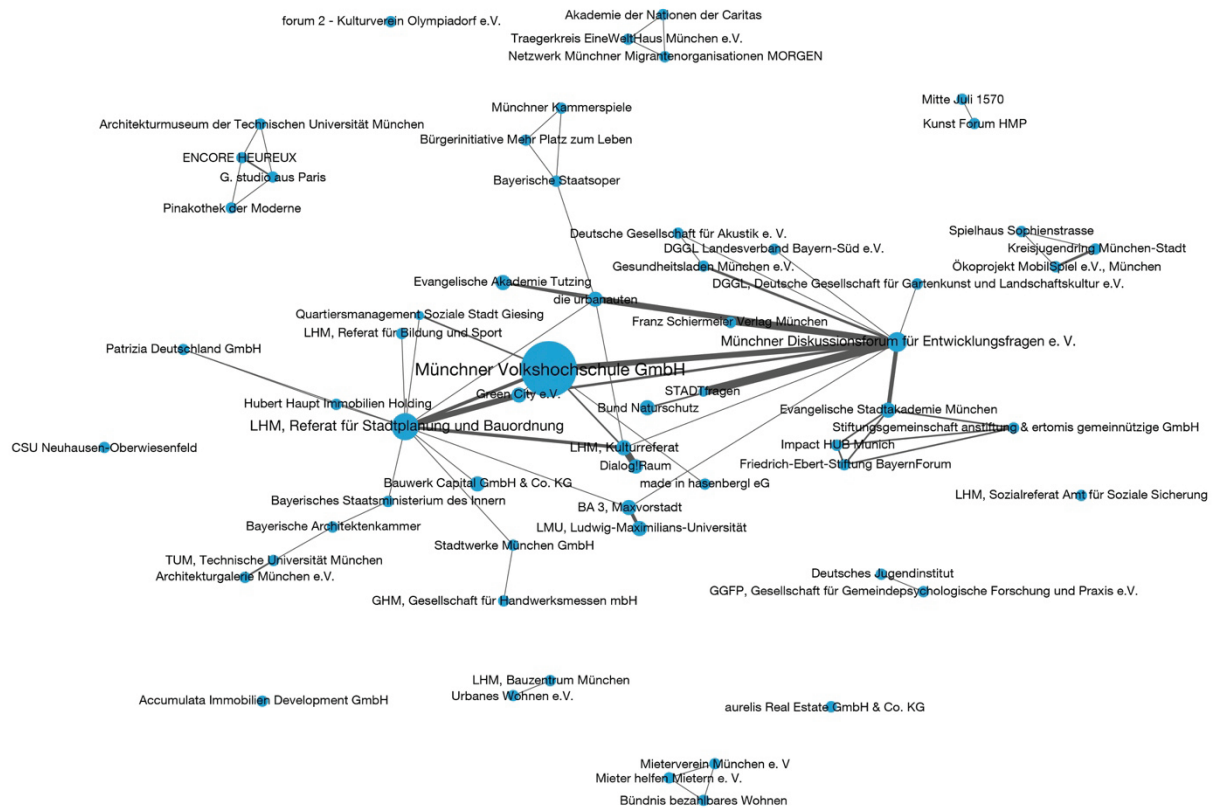


Figure 11. Network of the actors cooperating on housing issues.

The network analysis specifies the cooperation structures of the actors involved in each topic (figure 11 as an example for the housing issue). This analysis reveals very specific constellations of actors that go beyond the general perspective as presented in chapter 3.1. When looking for synergies between the different actors involved in Munich's 'landscape of participation', specific potentials can be drawn for each issue. Moreover, the thematic perspective on the cooperation of the different actors helps to identify issues of urban development that might bring in new actors and perspectives and thus new resources of civic, private and public commitment.

4. Conclusions

This paper proposes an actor centred research perspective on urban development and planning. It takes the public debate on the city as a starting point for the investigation of the 'landscape of participation' within a city. The involvement and participation of civic, private and public actors in urban development with their respective network-like structures are regarded as a resource for urban development and planning. From a systemic perspective there are important interdependencies between the public debate on the city and the actions and implementations taken in the city. The paper presents the methodology and intermediate results of an exploratory empirical study on the 'landscape of participation' in the city of Munich. This working paper sketches out preliminary empirical results based on a rough theoretical background. Both theory and the empirical work have to be further elaborated in future research.

Consequences for the city of Munich

The city of Munich shows a lively scene of actors involved in the public debate on the future of the city. Within that debate, the quantitative network analysis reveals the dominance of three main actors in the center of the network and a broad range of much smaller networks as well as individual actors in the periphery. These 'satellites' are only loosely connected or even not connected at all to the core of the network. The three main actors include the department of urban planning and building regulation of the city of Munich as well as the initiative 'Münchner Forum' and the adult education center – both receive financial support by the city of Munich. Thus all three key 'makers' of the public debate on the city are directly or indirectly influenced by public interests. The 'Münchner Forum' – founded in the 1960ies – today shows ageing members and the generation change proceeds only slowly. The adult education center of the city of Munich is the biggest of its kind in Germany and offers a highly diversified program for different target groups. Nevertheless it traditionally addresses the – mostly female – middle class over 50-years-old. So one major challenge for the 'landscape of participation' of the city of Munich is: How to expand the core of the network to new target groups? The actors on the periphery of the network already represent these more diverse cooperation partners with their respective audience.

The analysis shows, that thematic actor-networks are a key in order to address new partners and audience to the 'landscape of participation'. Culture turns out to be a vehicle for the discussion on the self-image of the city – that also influences other issues of urban development. The study reveals a broad interest in an overall debate on the city beyond distinct projects of city planning. In contrast, functional perspectives such as mobility, social issues or business and industry seem to be rather isolated in the public debate with only few links to other issues. Overall, the discourse is very much dominated by the department of urban planning and building regulation whereas other departments play only a minor role. In order to develop a future perspective for the growing city of Munich, it seems to be crucial to identify new thematic approaches to the public debate – beyond city planning and urban design on the one hand and beyond pure functional approaches on the other hand.

Additionally, the spatial analysis demonstrates a need for the orientation of the public debate towards a spatial scale in between an overall perspective on the city and individual urban projects within the city. The 'activity spaces' identified in the urban development strategy 'Munich Perspective' (Thierstein et al. 2010) provide such a spatial scale that relates to people's everyday home range including living, working and leisure time.

Conclusion of the general approach of the research

The empirical study proves the strength of the quantitative research approach in order to give an overview over the so far hidden ‘landscape of participation’. Visualisations of the quantitative dataset with diagrams, networks and maps are a key to uncover that landscape and an important starting point for a joint debate with the actors of that landscape.

The combination of three analytical foci with actors, spaces and themes turns out to be a ‘magic triangle’ for improving the public debate and participation in a city. Additionally it seems to be crucial to link the actor-centered research approach with a spatial perspective on urban development. In the focus-group workshop the spatial dimension of the quantitative analysis with its related visualizations opens an entirely new perspective for most participants. In future research, the spatial analysis should be elaborated further. The spatial footprint of the public debate on the city with its thematic characteristics could be analyzed in relation to social and economic patterns and their related dynamics as well as urban development projects and programs within the city.

The link of the quantitative analysis with the experience and knowledge of the actors involved in the focus-group workshop is a crucial step in the case study. The research team involves itself in the ‘landscape of participation’. Research enables the actors to reflect on their position within the public debate and the related actor-network. The confrontation of the self-perception of actors with the outside perception of the research results simulates a lively debate. This methodological approach fosters learning processes among the actors of Munich’s ‘landscape of participation’. This kind of collective learning is an important premise to develop new synergies and alliances for the growing city and thus go beyond the ‘usual suspects’.

Limitations and need for further research

The presented case study has an explorative character. There are important limitations of the quantitative approach: The dataset includes only those communication activities that can be detected by an ex post Internet search. All communication events within the last three years that are not documented on the web any more are missing in the analysis. Furthermore the research was restricted to face-to-face communication and deliberately excluded all communication on the Internet and in the social media – even though we know, that this kind of communication is of growing importance for the public debate on the city. The discussion in the workshop revealed that important actors within the city of Munich are systematically ignored in the analysis. These include international companies such as BMW and ADAC as the most important automobile club in Germany. These actors powerfully act behind the public stage but avoid the public ‘talking about the city’.

A quantitative network analysis does not inform on power structure on principle. Nevertheless, power structures are crucial when trying to assess the relation between the debate on the city and the actions taken in the city. Beyond the relations of the organized actors, the personal networks of the key players might exert major influence on urban development in Munich. This would demand for an ego-centered network analysis.

From the empirical perspective, the Munich case study calls for further qualitative research – e.g. with interviews and another focus-group workshop – that complement the quantitative findings. Furthermore, this single case study should be embedded in a comparison with further case studies on the ‘landscapes of participation’ in other cities. A further elaboration of the theoretical framework is necessary in order to answer the question: How does the debate on the city actually influence urban development and planning? The relation between ‘talking about the city’ and ‘acting in the city’ has to be conceived in more detail.

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