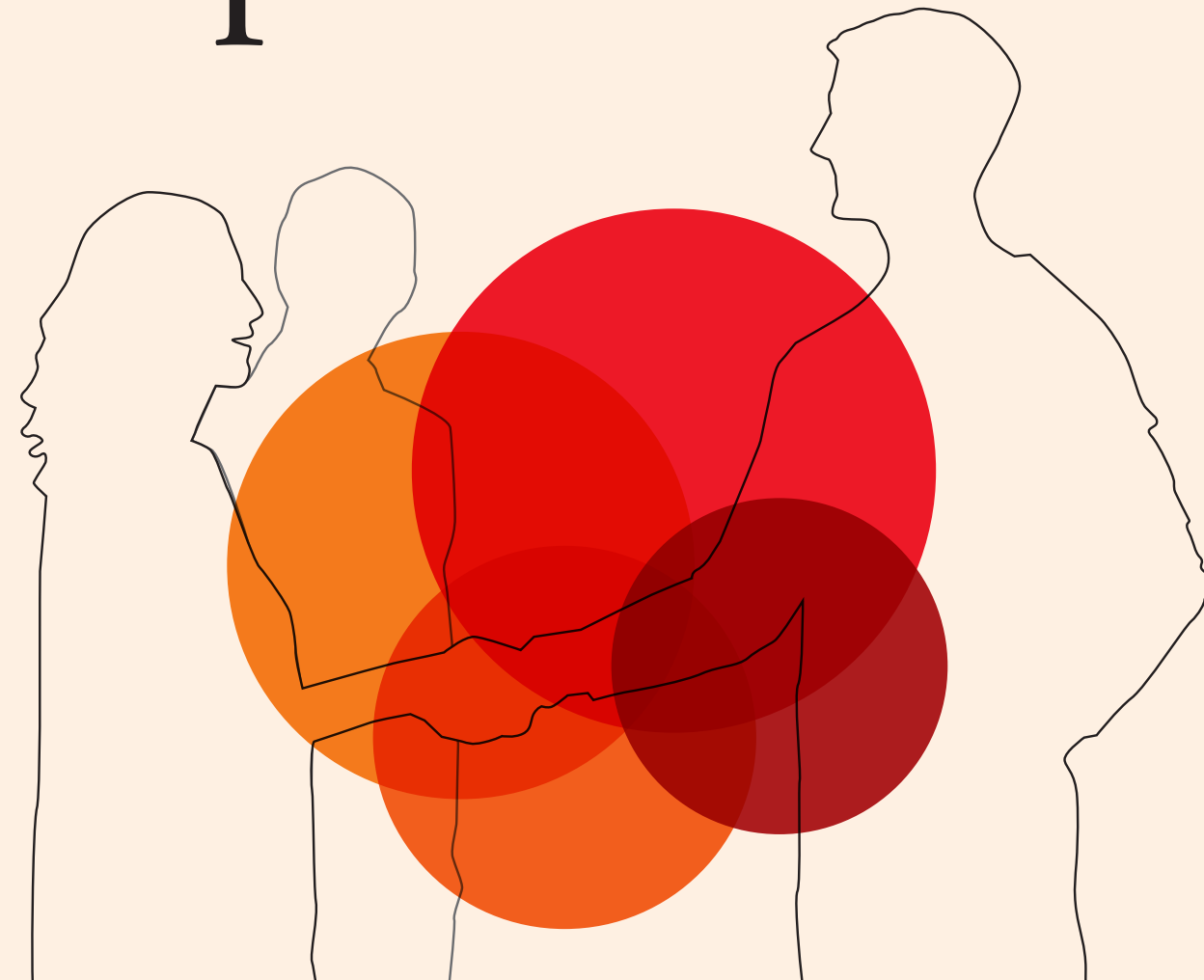
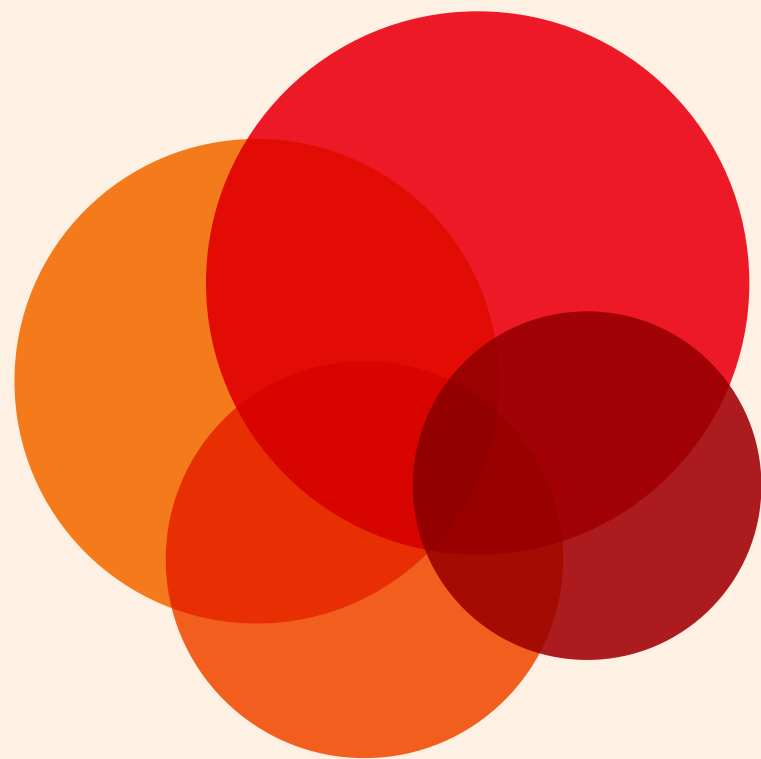


Perspektiven



Facilitating healthy communities

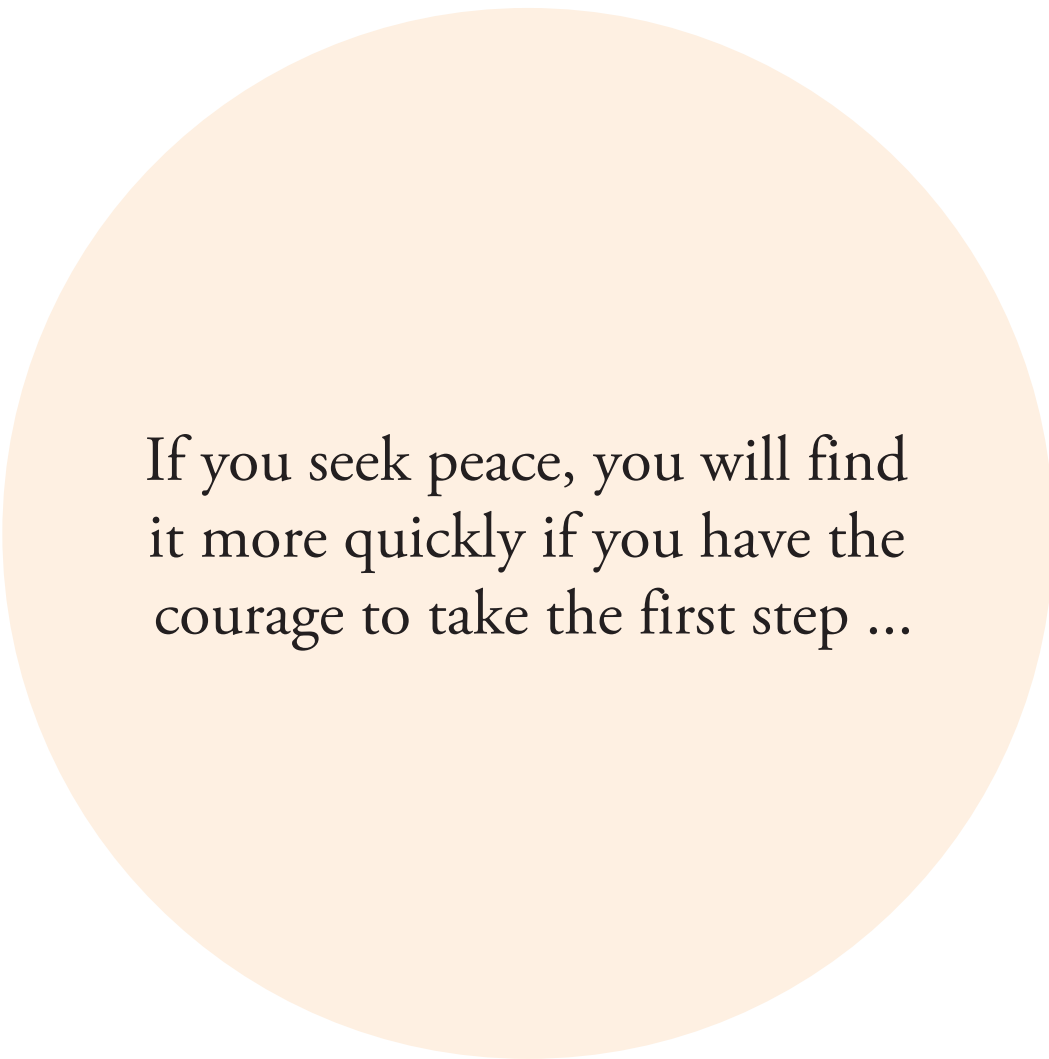
Five years of wohnpartner

Facilitating healthy communities

Five years of wohnpartner

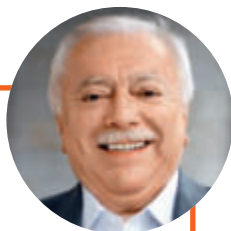
With articles from

- Emina Adamovic · Gül Akkilic · Johanna Blum · Josef Cser · Ulrike Freigaßner-Hauser
- Alexander Hauer · Michael Häupl · Walther Hohenbalken · Bernhard Hoser · Ole Jensen
- Aniko Kaposvari · Ebru Kaya · Christoph Krepl · Dinah Lepuschitz-Stocker · Jan Mayrhofer
- Martin Mikulik · Jan Mossakowski · Josef Neumayer · Peter Neundlinger · Günther Ogris
- Christa Pelikan · Karin Preisinger · Bernd Rohrauer · Forozan Savari · Angelika Schäfer-Weibold
- Christian Schantl · Müesser Seebacher · Johannes Spitzl · Christoph Stoik · Elmar Türk



If you seek peace, you will find
it more quickly if you have the
courage to take the first step ...

Richard Freiherr von Weizsäcker



Editorial

Respect and consideration

Living together in harmony requires rules that apply to everyone.

Mutual respect and consideration are the key to peaceful co-existence in our city. This applies to everyone who lives here. Because social security and a stable society are only possible when everyone can live together in peace.

A community can only function well when everyone follows certain rules. This is just as true in a city as it is in interpersonal relationships. In Vienna, all should be able to lead a life of peace and prosperity. Thus, it goes without saying that we are firmly opposed to discrimination against any fellow resident based on appearance, beliefs, or sexual orientation. The city administration does all it can to promote the peaceful and respectful co-existence of all of Vienna's residents. And we ensure that the rules needed to guarantee this are followed. Because a kind reminder is unfortunately not always enough. Sometimes, more must be done to make sure that the rules are followed in hospitals, in Vienna's parks, in public transportation, and in municipal housing complexes. Roughly a half a million people currently live in Vienna's municipal housing, and it is especially important here that the rules for harmonious co-existence are followed. The wohnpartner service was launched five years ago and focuses on the needs of the residents in these housing developments. It serves as a contact and mediator for conflicts with neighbours, provides individual counselling, and has a high degree of social competence. Networking and collaboration with other agencies of the City of Vienna ensure that the best possible solutions are found for the concerns of everyone living in municipal housing.

wohnpartner shows what we understand under working pro-actively to achieve greater respect and consideration in our city.

Michael Häupl, Mayor

© Portrait: Ian Elim

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Empowerment for Vienna's municipal housing complexes

Interview with Executive Councillor Michael Ludwig

Perspektiven interview with Executive City Councillor for Housing Michael Ludwig about the responsibilities and goals of the city's wohnpartner service and the importance of its area of responsibility, Vienna's municipal housing complexes.

Mr Councillor, you presented a very nice contemporary witness project at Goethehof together with wohnpartner that resulted in a book and exhibition about the history of this housing complex. Does this fall under the purview of an institution such as wohnpartner, whose primary objective is promoting good community relations?

Michael Ludwig: Of course. You need to promote peaceful coexistence in many different, creative ways. You have to reach and involve as many residents as possible and motivate them to contribute actively to a healthy community. You also have to involve and motivate people who have difficulties approaching others for personal or social reasons to communicate and to give voice to their ideas and wishes. The project with the contemporary witnesses at Goethehof is one such creative approach for fostering a vibrant community.

Can you tell more about the project at Goethehof?

Michael Ludwig: Neighbourhood and coexistence are central parts of everyone's life, day in and day out. We interact with numerous people who have different behaviours, interests, and backgrounds. Each person also has a very different capacity for and interest in dealing with other people. A person's age is also an important factor in this. When you talk about a neighbourhood, you are always confronted with diversity, and from this diversity you must find a common and positive ground for everyone. No matter whether you are talking about responsible policies in a housing complex or your work environment.

The goal of the wohnpartner project at Goethehof was not only to conduct a historical analysis, but also to build bridges between generations. The stories and reports of the contemporary witnesses help younger people to better understand the living conditions that shaped the older generation. This better understanding leads to greater empathy and tolerance, which are key prerequisites for every good relationship and also good neighbourly interactions. The book presentation and exhibition were also a nice opportunity for the residents to get together and talk with one another. And last but not least, it was very important to me and wohnpartner to express our great respect for Goethehof and its residents. The

group at Goethehof also felt this, was very pleased and showed great pride in its homes in the complex, in its community, and in the contemporary witnesses who made the project possible.

So the responsibilities of wohnpartner are clearly defined on the one hand, but it also needs to apply new approaches and methods that may seem unconventional at first glance – is that a good summary?

Michael Ludwig: Yes, definitely.

Reading through this issue, one can't help but notice how many small projects wohnpartner is engaged in. This is certainly costly in terms of time and other resources – does it pay off?

Michael Ludwig: It more than pays off, it is the basis for all effective community organising work. This approach is based on the idea of addressing the individual needs and wishes of the residents in the different housing complexes. Because every complex has its own characteristics. Not only in terms of architecture, but also in terms of the composition of the resident community.

With wohnpartner, you created a dedicated and continuous institution for the municipal housing complexes in 2010 that works to facilitate healthy communities and that also offers professional conflict resolution services. Why? Do Vienna's municipal housing complexes need special service, are conflicts there particularly common or difficult?

Michael Ludwig: This is an issue that is particularly important to me. As the owner of the municipal housing complexes, the City of Vienna takes its responsibility for the residents in these complexes very seriously. One result of this is a tenant co-determination statute, which grants these residents more rights than they would have in other forms of housing. Wiener Wohnen also offers facility management services that are among the best in the world and that go far beyond standard building management. These services are also constantly evaluated, refined, improved, and adapted to the wishes of the tenants. The latest milestone was the new Wiener Wohnen service centre that was opened in December 2014. Wiener Wohnen offers its tenants full information and advisory services with extended opening hours at a central and very customer-friendly location. The headquarters of wohnpartner are now also located at the site by the Gasometer towers along with all other key institutions for municipal and subsidised housing.

The service offices for the City's housing complexes, which then became wohnpartner, arose from the City's particular commitment to caring for its housing complexes. wohnpartner was not created



on the basis of specific needs or some special conditions in the municipal housing complexes. Conflicts arise between neighbours in other forms of housing, as well. Tenants in privately owned apartment buildings, owners of single-family homes, and people living in urban garden complexes are all confronted with noise, one of the main causes of conflicts among neighbours. Many of the people in Vienna have dealt with this. The difference is that the City of Vienna works specifically to promote peaceful coexistence in its housing complexes.

wohnpartner currently has a staff of roughly 150 for around 2,000 municipal housing complexes. Is that enough?

Michael Ludwig: Yes, because the municipal housing complexes have a very high quality of life and the lowest rents in the city. As a result, the communities are very healthy in many of the complexes, and the residents live together with very little friction.

Residents from migrant backgrounds are also a key issue in municipal housing complexes and seem to bring particular challenges.

Michael Ludwig: Vienna is an attractive city, so it is growing rapidly. In addition to the increasing positive birth rate and the rising

life expectancy of the Viennese, we are also seeing a high level of migration from the other provinces of Austria and from Germany. About 49 per cent of the population has a migrant background. Vienna was also home to many migrants in past periods such as the turn of the last century, when two million people lived in the city. This is also evidenced by many last names of “old” Viennese families. But one cannot compare the situation now with then, when Vienna had the worst housing conditions in all of Europe with the majority of the population living in squalor.

The municipal housing complexes are a reflection of the Vienna of today. And the growth of the city and the inflow of migrants are just as much of an issue here as elsewhere in Vienna. We have migrants who have generally lived in Vienna for some time and who originally came from Serbia or Turkey. And the vast majority of the city’s new residents carry their own weight. They work here, pay taxes, and contribute to meeting the needs of the entire population as small business owners and as hospital and other care staff. They bring fresh wind into the city, but also different mentalities and customs. Their language skills are also sometimes a hurdle in communication. This makes it important to eliminate misunderstandings at the communication level when conflicts arise and to create connections between people. wohnpartner has proven to be very successful in this, as can be seen in the articles in this issue of *Perspektiven*. Another important insight from wohnpartner’s work is

that there are very few conflicts that can actually be attributed to an individual's migrant background. Generation conflicts arising from the different needs of younger and older people in terms of courtyard use are much more common, for example, and are nothing new. Everyone who grew up in a municipal housing complex knows that someone shouted down out of a window 40 years ago, too, when kids played for too long or too loudly in the courtyard.

But migrants generally have more children than the long-established population.

Michael Ludwig: I think that two things are important: following the house rules and respecting the needs and wishes of others. wohnpartner brings people together and creates a basis for exchange and interaction. When people get together, all it usually takes to resolve differences of opinion is a little bit of goodwill. Approaching your counterpart in a conflict and being open to this person's attitudes is never easy, but always helps. A high level of satisfaction with one's living conditions also requires good neighbourly relations.

Drawing lines, only taking one's own needs into account, and prejudices are always detrimental, no matter what is at stake. There are unfortunately also those in Vienna who try to divide people. The results of such actions are conflicts that benefit only a few, usually the instigators of such aggressive initiatives.

But good neighbourly relations also require that everyone follows certain basic rules. It's like on the football pitch: A player who constantly fouls other players and ignores the admonitions and warnings of others will be kicked out of the game. Black sheep who make life difficult for other residents can expect to lose their flat as a result of their inappropriate behaviour. I insist on this.

wohnpartner is celebrating its first milestone birthday. Five years – long enough for a look back. Which wohnpartner projects were the most successful in your opinion?

Michael Ludwig: Well, the first is a major project – wohnpartner itself. An institution of the City of Vienna and the City's housing construction department that has proven its worth and that has even won awards. wohnpartner is a model organisation in Europe in the facilitation of good communities. Delegations from the EU and even Russia now come to Vienna to learn more and to apply the know-how of our community service in the municipal housing complexes. The City of Vienna makes wohnpartner possible, but its success is the result of the efforts of its management and staff. The commitment and passion with which they work is clearly evident and palpable in this issue of *Perspektiven*.

wohnpartner has launched a large number of successful initiatives together with tenants. It would be unfair for me to select the "most successful" of these. Because each of these smaller and larger highlights in the municipal housing complexes pays an important role.

So no best-of for the five-year anniversary?

Michael Ludwig: There are many. Some projects may seem to be more impressive from the outside, but that is not a fair benchmark. What counts is the satisfaction and happiness that wohnpartner achieves for the residents by creating more harmonious communities through its efforts to make people more confident, to motivate them to take on more responsibility, and to take more of an active part in community life and contribute their talents.

Where do you see the limits of wohnpartner?

Michael Ludwig: Even the best community organising work ends where an individual's own responsibility begins. wohnpartner's most important responsibility can best be expressed with the word empowerment. Strengthening and enabling residents to play an active role in shaping their community and to take responsibility for this community. That is what wohnpartner motivates and invites the residents to do. The numerous volunteers in the municipal housing complexes are an inspiring and visible example of this. When you talk with these volunteers, you notice that there are problems and that it is sometimes difficult, but at the end of the day, their work enriches their lives and makes them happy. And I think that all the people who do not have such a high profile and who help each other as good neighbours feel the same way. Because in the municipal housing complexes, in Vienna, and everywhere else in the world: It is what we have in common and not what sets us apart that makes us strong.

Those are very inspiring closing words.

Mr Councillor, thank you very much for the interview!

“Background and motivations”

Interview with wohnpartner Director Josef Cser

In the following interview, Josef Cser talks about his memories of the establishment of wohnpartner as its current director. He tells about the background, ideas, and challenges at the start of the organisation and looks back at this time with the experience he has gained over the past five years.

Executive City Councillor for Housing Michael Ludwig initiated wohnpartner in 2010. You were not only closely involved in this decision, but were also appointed to manage wohnpartner. What motivations do you think were behind the establishment of wohnpartner?

Josef Cser: To boil it all down, it was primarily a question of functionality. wohnpartner was preceded by the municipal service offices. In other words, the development began in the early 2000s when the City of Vienna outsourced the management of the municipal housing complexes to these service offices. From then on, this institution had two divisions: There were the service offices for city renewal and the service offices for municipal housing complexes. It was recognised at the time that the social aspect is relevant and important, but it was not clear that this aspect is most important. The teams in the service offices were composed of lawyers, landscape architects, city planners, and architects because it was assumed that a large share of the work would revolve around “technical” issues. But such issues diminished successively. One day, it was time to award new contracts for the operation of the service offices. At the time, I was responsible for the offices as the housing policy advisor in the administrative group for housing, housing construction, and city renewal and played a key role in drafting the request for quotes. We noticed that the service offices not only had different territories, but that they also worked very differently. One engaged in a great deal of consulting and brought a lot of know-how into the respective neighbourhood – that was the service office for city renewal. The other, the office for municipal housing complexes, did a great deal of relationship work. At the time, new

quotes were collected for the service offices every three to five years. For the municipal housing complexes, this also meant that the relationships with the residents had to be built up again every three to five years because the contacts changed. The tenants were the same, but the employees in the service office could be entirely different people after the new contracts were awarded. We saw that as a major deficit. There were other important considerations such as the fact that the teams could not learn from each other because they were competitors when the new contracts were being awarded. Or the fact that the employees did not have the same working conditions – the conducted activities and quality assurance were also not uniform. Mediation could mean one thing in the 10th district and something else in the 15th. We thought it should be possible for employees to exchange experiences and to learn from each other in this way.

All of this pointed to a dedicated structure. At the time, we did not yet know that the whole thing would be called “wohnpartner”. That came much later. Further questions arose and were discussed in many meetings with employees in the service offices, and we noticed that we quickly reached our limits in terms of substantive work in the prevailing structure. Longer-term projects were not feasible because there was no way to ensure that things would continue after the three to five years. There was no way to discuss on a Vienna-wide basis mediation practices and how conflicts should be handled, the results analysed and applied, and methods standardised. There were also numerous different approaches and states of knowledge on community work. Today, we can ensure continuity. That was impossible then.

What happened after this fundamental analysis?

Josef Cser: As new contracts had to be awarded for the service offices, Executive City Councillor for Housing Michael Ludwig charged me with drawing up a proposal for a new structure. We formed a qualified and competent team: Tove Raiby, Claudia Huemer, Markus Schaden, Natascha Artner, and me, and later also Ellen Pfliegerl and Duska Raica-Fröschl. In reality, we all shared an unspoken vision as a result of the experiences we had gathered at different levels in the previous years. That made the work so exciting,



© Stefan Zamisch

and was probably one of the reasons that we were successful. We weren't just specialists in community work and conflict resolution, but also contributed vastly different knowledge and experiences. We brought all of that to the table. And tried to sculpt the organisation "wohnpartner" from that mass. Councillor Ludwig supported us and approved of the new structure that we eventually proposed, so he gave us the green light.

After wohnpartner was launched at the beginning of 2010, we took a critical look after six or nine months to think about what had gone well up until then, and what we could improve. All employees were involved in this participative process. Together, we redefined our motives and principles. And I am extremely proud of that! At the very start of the young organisation, we were able to initiate a participative process that gave birth to the principles, attitudes, and values that still apply to wohnpartner today. But these are all just as dynamic as many other things in our agency. They are certain to change, and we examine them critically on a regular basis. So that's the history of wohnpartner, and I don't think it will be easy for anyone to match it.

You used a nice metaphor, that of sculpting: You put all of the material on the table and create something from it. Looking back, after five or six years including the preparations, how do you feel that things have gone after the "sculpting"? How successful have you been?

Josef Cser: I think that we have grown into areas that we were not even able to imagine in the beginning. I also don't think it makes

any sense to think about how things will be in five years when you are dealing with processes where people have a significant influence. When you go into processes without fixed expectations, you can't know exactly what things will look like in a few years.

This used to bother us, we thought that we weren't working properly or cleanly because we didn't write concepts that said what exactly was going to happen in three years. Now, we are more relaxed because we aren't the only ones who work this way. This approach is also common in other creative industries like the computer industry. There is even a name for this in organisational development, "rapid prototyping": You begin working on the basis of your ideas and vision, then stop after a while and check whether you are still on the right path. If you're not, you change course. I think this is a very sensible approach, and that it is very healthy for our field.

I think that wohnpartner has grown to become an unbelievably diverse and exciting success story over the past five years, and I don't just feel this way because of the interview. I am very proud, definitely. Almost a little reverent, though reverent is a very big word. But there is an indescribable energy, a dynamism and vibrancy in many different places in this organisation. As the director of wohnpartner, I now see myself as a "protector". Because the whole thing is developing extremely well – little intervention is necessary. What I mean is that I have to provide little technical input. So I'm the one who has to furnish the framework conditions, who has to ensure that the great things that are happening here can continue to happen. I don't think you could say anything better about an organisation!



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Living is more than just having a roof over your head

The establishment of wohnpartner and its integration into Wohnservice Wien

by Peter Neundlinger

Since the beginning of 2010, our organisation has addressed a major responsibility and challenge under the framework of a new service, as have I myself as managing director of Wohnservice Wien.

The transition from the service offices for the city housing complexes not only caused our company to grow rapidly from 50 to 170 employees (and now over 200), but also necessitated the incorporation of a new field of activity.

The integration of wohnpartner expanded the offerings of Wohnservice Wien to include a comprehensive range of quality-of-living services. The existing spectrum of housing advice/offer management, information centre/tenant help, and marketing/PR was further expanded by wohnpartner. Living is more than just having a roof over your head. Vienna is working to address social

developments – such as changed family and population structures, individual tenant needs, and changes in facility management and complex communities.

The combination of services that were previously provided by multiple contractors in our company is an outstanding example of how the services of the City of Vienna for the benefit of its residents – in this case tenants in municipal housing – can be improved further and how the City can play an internationally pioneering role.



Peter Neundlinger, Managing Director of Wohnservice Wien

© Portrait: Susanne Meitz

Municipal housing in Vienna

History, tradition, and social importance

by Christian Schantl

Vienna's municipal housing complexes have been making a key contribution to the high quality of life in the city for nearly 100 years.

On 21 September 1923, the cornerstone of the first major housing construction programme in the city was laid in “Red Vienna of the First Republic”, an internationally unique success story. The City Council resolution called for the creation of 25,000 new flats within five years. This first housing construction programme was completed ahead of schedule at the end of 1926. Thus, the City Council expanded its initial programme to 30,000 flats and decided to build a further 30,000 flats from 1929 to 1933. Red Vienna had a social housing construction programme like nowhere else in the world. Until the democratic government was deposed in 1933, over 66,000 residential units were built in 348 housing complexes and 42 settlements. One tenth of Vienna's population already lived in municipal housing in 1934.

The goal was to provide apartments with a high level of quality that were affordable for a broad section of the population. The city achieved more than that. It created housing complexes that were built according to the criteria of “light, air, and sun”, and that offered space for daycare centres, schools, libraries, and communal institutions.

Even though numerous new approaches have been developed and implemented over the decades since then, the most important principles of “Red Vienna of the First Republic” still apply today. In addition to affordability, these include high quality, social cohesion, and a balanced social variety.

The prime directive of Viennese housing construction policy has always been to respond flexibly to the living needs of the city's residents and to build housing that fulfils the wishes of the population. This has not only worked well in the past, but will also shape the future of living in Vienna. For example, the City is responding



to the growing need for high-quality, low-cost housing with the SMART housing construction programme.

Today, roughly 60 per cent of Vienna's residents live in a subsidised flat – either in one of the 220,000 municipal flats or in one of the 200,000 cooperative flats built with City funding. A half a million people live in the roughly 2,000 municipal housing complexes alone.

Viennese housing policy is recognised around the world as a successful model. It comes as no surprise that international experts are showing increased interest in Vienna's approach. There is no other city in Europe that has such a degree of continuity in its social housing policy, and that did not abandon this policy when neoliberalism and privatisation ruled the day. The City is commit-

ted to the municipal housing complexes, and never considered selling these properties, unlike many other cities. The large supply of subsidised flats helps keep rents lower in the city's entire apartment market. Because of this, Vienna has lower rents than many other major cities. And Vienna still has a wide range of affordable flats to offer.

According to its statutes, the objective of Wiener Wohnen – the manager of the 220,000 municipal flats in Vienna and the largest residential facility manager in Europe – is the provision and management of good-standard rental flats for individuals and families with lower incomes in need of an apartment. Living up to this responsibility and the objectives of the nearly 100 years of municipal housing is both a permanent challenge and a source of motivation.



Christian Schantl, Wiener Wohnen

The history of social housing construction in Vienna

When faced with a never-before-seen population explosion, the City of Vienna responded with a unique municipal housing construction project. The population of Vienna rose from roughly 440,000 to over 2 million from 1840 to 1918. This caused extremely poor living conditions, especially for the working class.

The majority of the population suffered extremely poor housing conditions, crowded into flats without running water. These flats primarily consisted of one room and a kitchen, with the kitchen only being lighted and ventilated from the hallway. There was only one water basin and a shared toilet on each storey. To cover the high rents, beds were let out to labourers on an hourly basis. There were roughly 170,000 such labourers and sub-letters in Vienna in 1910.

The extreme density of people in the buildings and the unhygienic conditions resulted in epidemics. Tuberculosis was called the “Viennese sickness” because it was more prevalent in Vienna than anywhere else in Europe, and was a typical plague of the working class.

Unemployment, illness, and accidents caused tenants and sub-letters to be evicted, leaving them homeless. Hunger demonstrations and tenant strikes became more and more frequent starting in 1910. The Christian-Socialist city administration of the time rejected municipal housing construction as a solution to the lack of flats. Only a few communal operations such as the tramway direction built factory flats for their employees. And even these efforts came to a halt during World War I.

Despite the decreasing population at the end of World War I as a result of emigration to the former crown countries and the decrease in the birth rate, there was still an acute shortage of flats. Little was invested in buildings during the war. Nearly 75 per cent of the roughly 550,000 flats in Vienna were overcrowded one- and two-room apartments in 1917.

Even worse, because of the now low rents, sub-letters were no longer taken in. The average occupancy per flat fell, but it became even more difficult for people with the lowest incomes to find a place to live.

This dire situation led to the “wild” settlement movement after 1918. Some 90,000 Viennese were homeless. Undeveloped land was claimed to build ramshackle huts. Due to the scope of this movement, the settlers started receiving assistance through the establishment of settlement cooperatives from 1921 onward.

When Vienna's city administration was taken over by the Social Democratic Workers Party after the city council elections in 1919, a fundamental change took place in housing construction. The legal prerequisites were met when Vienna was designated as a separate province on 1 January 1922, gaining tax sovereignty. Further prerequisites were met with the purchase of a sufficient quantity of suitable building land and the securing of financing for construction. The end of inflation in 1925 marked the beginning of a new phase of social housing construction that was characterised by the start of extensive communal construction.

Under the difficult economic conditions, it was not easy for the City of Vienna to raise the funds to build new housing complexes. The tax reform of Councillor of Finance Hugo Breitner, which created a new revenue basis for the city, delivered the decisive impulse for social housing construction. First, Councillor Hugo Breitner abolished the rent tax that applied the same tax rate to all rents and introduced a new rent tax that only applied to the top 20 per cent of the rents. Breitner then developed the appropriated housing construction tax together with Robert Danneberg, which was adopted in 1923 and became the most important source of financing for municipal construction.

International influence

Success story: Social housing construction in Red Vienna

by Alexander Hauer

Vienna's social building activities and especially its municipal housing complexes are considered a prime example of successful housing policy around the world.

This policy creates space for living in a growing city, keeps rents down in Vienna's entire apartment market, and secures tens of thousands of jobs. Even the international media have taken notice and have covered this success story made in Vienna. Aside from sustainability, one of the secrets to the success of the Viennese model is the social variety in its municipal housing. This prevents the formation of ghettos like can be found in other European cities. This also has a positive effect on the subjective sense of security of the residents, it provides for "social peace".

Networking in the EU: Preserving social achievements together

Now, it is time to protect what has been built. Developments in some European cities (such as in the Netherlands) show that access to social housing in the EU could be impeded by excessive regulation. There is also the danger that cities could be forced to sell properties, possibly to private investors.

The City of Vienna and Mayor Michael Häupl in particular took immediate action in light of this potential scenario and played a key role in initiating a network for the protection of social housing throughout Europe. Mayors from 30 major European cities representing a total of over 33 million people (including Amsterdam, Berlin, Bratislava, Ljubljana, Rome, Paris, and Warsaw) signed a "Resolution to Promote the Preservation and Further Expansion of Social and Sustainable Housing in Europe". This resolution was signed by members of all political factions. The objective was to allow the cities to continue stipulating the criteria for the allocation and construction of subsidised housing.

This initiative was closely monitored in Brussels, and resulted in the European Declaration on Responsible Housing, which was endorsed by further key decisions makers and organisations. For Vienna, Executive City Councillor for Housing Michael Ludwig signed the declaration in Brussels. "Europe, and especially the sectors of housing and public services, may not be left solely to the market and profit-oriented companies," Ludwig emphasised. He continued: "We are taking a clear stand against neoliberal lobbyists, who are pursuing the sole objective of maximising their own profits. We are committed to a social and responsible Europe."

World cities want to learn from Vienna

A travelling multimedia exhibition underscored the high reputation that Vienna's housing policy enjoys. It was even displayed at the European Parliament in October 2014. *Gemeinde baut. Wiener Wohnbau 1920–2020* (Building together. Viennese housing construction from 1920–2020) deals with the importance of social housing construction from the beginnings of Red Vienna of the First Republic to the present day and into the future, where issues such as household size (single apartments) and economic and ecological considerations play an important role. Even countries outside of the EU are highly interested in Vienna's housing policy. The exhibition went from Brussels straight to Istanbul. And now, Vienna's approach to social housing is having an influence on the Bosphorus.



Alexander Hauer, Public Relations Advisor,
Viennese Housing Construction



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Great interest in Vienna's social housing policy in Istanbul – the exhibition about housing in Red Vienna over the last 100 years went all the way to the Bosphorus in 2014.



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Mayor Michael Häupl and Executive City Councillor for Housing Michael Ludwig initiated a Europe-wide front to protect social housing in the EU.

Municipal housing, Wiener Wohnen

Harmonious communities in municipal housing

by Josef Neumayer

Guaranteeing housing security and price and eviction protection is a fundamental promise of Wiener Wohnen. But living satisfaction also requires good tenant relations and a liveable social environment.

Municipal housing offers people in Vienna with lower incomes affordable and adequate homes that meet their needs. Some 500,000 people, or one quarter of all of Vienna's residents, live in these municipal housing complexes. Secure, long-term housing is a key prerequisite for participation in society. In this way, municipal housing makes a key contribution to social peace in Vienna.

Wiener Wohnen is dedicated to ensuring healthy communities in the city's municipal housing complexes. This goes far beyond the provision of clean and well managed infrastructure. Our focus is the people who live together in our housing complexes – with all their diversity, wishes, needs, and cares. As a social facility manager, we offer our clients services that private facility management companies do not provide. We have a 24-hour service hotline, a 24-hour emergency hotline, a 24-hour special cleaning service, a carrying service for physically disabled persons when lifts are out of service for longer periods of time, the possibility to arrange payments in instalments, and much more. When there are major technical problems in apartment buildings or fires in flats, we immediately assist the affected residents. We also help our tenants to resolve conflicts with their neighbours. Well trained social workers and the mediators from wohnpartner work together with the involved parties to find solutions. All of these additional services are part of our social responsibility and part of social management.

Social management as an operating philosophy

For us, social management is part of our operating philosophy. We work intensively with numerous organisations including wohnpartner; the police; cultural, sport, social, youth, and integration clubs; and city services to ensure a high level of living satisfaction. We support measures that improve living conditions for people and that promote positive coexistence. This requires that our employees have healthy attitudes towards our customers. Our nomination for the European Responsible Housing Award in 2014 shows that we are among the best in Europe in social management. This is wonderful affirmation of all the things we do for the people in Vienna.



Josef Neumayer has worked for the City of Vienna since 1975. He began at MA 34 and was appointed its director in 2003. He has been the director of Stadt Wien – Wiener Wohnen since November 2011.

The big picture

Three pillars at wohnpartner

by Angelika Schäfer-Weibold

wohnpartner has expert staff who professionally answer enquiries, address needs, and offers conflict resolution that arise in Vienna's municipal housing complexes. The areas of activity are defined and described by the three pillars of wohnpartner's work: community work, conflict resolution, and networking.

wohnpartner offers support at different levels with the goal of enabling residents to actively shape their living environment. Individual possibilities and coping strategies are expanded by empowering residents to resolve conflicts and find solutions on their own. The community work is based on different methods from various fields such as social work, sociology, economics, psychology, social geography, spatial planning, political science, and art. Conflict resolution and community work are both oriented towards the needs of the involved people, and motivate them to take initiative.

Conflict resolution, community work, and networking are also closely related and are always viewed together as a whole. For

example, conflict situations and their resolution can be the spark that initiates community work activities in housing complexes. Networking activities can also facilitate processes for community work. And encounters made in community work can contribute to resolving conflicts. The goal is always the big picture, namely a liveable, flexible, needs-oriented living environment in which residents can meet and privacy is respected.

Systematic conflict resolution and community work

Residents usually contact wohnpartner in person or by telephone with concrete concerns. They also approach wohnpartner with their concerns through the city administration, political representatives, and other institutions. The issues at hand are identified, analysed, and structured in an initial meeting. Depending on the issue, wohnpartner may also act as an intermediary, involving other agencies and companies to handle structural, legal, or social matters. Contact with government representatives and the city administration also plays an important role. When the matter at hand is a communication or neighbourhood conflict or an issue that affects community work activities in general such as different needs in the use of outdoor space, wohnpartner is responsible. If multiple interest groups are affected by a conflict, the staff evaluates whether a community work process should be initiated.

In the assessment phase, wohnpartner developed options for action together with the residents. Further actions and possible methods for implementation can be planned through coaching and the counselling. In this phase, the solution can be mediation between individual neighbours, or other negotiation processes may also be considered. Underlying needs can be recognised and addressed through the analysis of various conflict topics that are brought to wohnpartner. If an issue is mentioned by all parties in a conflict, this can mean that this issue affects all or a large share of the residents in a complex. For example, a conflict between neighbours can point to a communication problem in the entire complex. wohnpartner can apply many different methods of conflict



Barbara Jilek-Melzer, Wiener Wohnen

“From community activities to strengthening the social structures in complexes and conflict resolution, wohnpartner is an important partner for us. As is the case everywhere else, there will always be various differences of opinion among the many people living in municipal housing. In addition to the efforts of Wiener Wohnen, wohnpartner assists involved residents in resolving conflicts and by often heading off potential problems before they arise.”



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resolution and community work. It may also be possible to resolve an individual conflict between neighbours through a community work method. The resolution of the issue in the entire complex brings lasting benefits for everyone involved.

Last but not least

In the event of conflicts and in community work processes, the cooperation partners that are important for the subsequent work must be identified. The three pillars of wohnpartner's work are closely related in this.

A community work or conflict resolution process can be concluded by successful resolution, a change in the underlying situation, or the assumption of self-organisation by the residents. In the case of the latter, it is important that the wohnpartner employees withdraw from the ongoing processes gradually and transfer responsibility for the maintenance of the structures that have been created to the local individuals.

In the case of mediation, a mediation report with mutual agreements is drawn up. If wohnpartner is not successful in mediating a solution, the employees discuss alternatives with the residents involving other institutions and agencies.

Networking and cooperation

As a learning organisation, wohnpartner engages in interdisciplinary, supraregional, national, and international networking to col-

laborate with other institutions and to define joint strategies. This networking also serves to enhance wohnpartner's capabilities.

wohnpartner works with existing local networks such as tenant representatives, janitors, active resident groups, and neighbours in adjacent properties to focus the interests and needs of tenants and to promote self-organisation. When such networks are not present, wohnpartner helps to build them.

wohnpartner also promotes contact between residents and decision makers in the district and city administration offices and in the facility management offices (such as Wiener Wohnen or other non-profit building managers) and involves them in the resolution of specific issues when appropriate. wohnpartner concludes cooperation agreements with the most important partners to define a framework for joint work and interaction and for procedures for overlapping areas.

Collaboration with other social and educational institutions such as youth work and the adult education centres is crucial for achieving the goals outlined above. wohnpartner also seeks to improve the public image of municipal housing complexes through activities with residents.



Angelika Schäfer-Weibold, Deputy Director of Professional Development and Quality Management

© Portrait: Jenny Fetz/W5W



Conflict resolution, community work, networking

Development of wohnpartner's work

Interview by Angelika Schäfer-Weibold with Claudia Huemer

What does the work of wohnpartner cover?

Claudia Huemer: wohnpartner was established five years ago, and we have been providing our various services since then. In simple terms, our work is divided into three areas: The pillar of conflict resolution with a wide and growing range of methods and approaches. The pillar of community work, which is simultaneously preventative conflict resolution work. This means that by going to the residential complexes, we make use of the existing potential and ensure that conflicts do not arise in the first place. In our community work, residents also draw attention to conflicts that must be worked out. Community work has developed very intensively,

and has grown the most together with the third pillar of our activities, networking.

We were entirely unknown in the city five years ago, but we were able to show that we are a fair cooperation partner that treats its counterparts with respect. Networking is the foundation of our work. We treat everyone equally, are taken seriously, and are appreciated. We also have a certain degree of authority. Every city and every residential complex is home to different interest groups that do not always understand each other, and that sometimes have no opportunity to talk with each other. In such cases, we work to create a good setting for communication – if that is what the involved parties want. The principle of voluntary action is very

important to us. Each side strives to explain their own views and lives, with varying degrees of success. This is important to each of our employees.

Can you give an example of such a success?

Claudia Huemer: I think that you can already call it a success when someone who points out a problem or expresses dissatisfaction shows some degree of understanding that there are other viewpoints and other perspectives that they do not understand and that they do not have to accept, but when they at least recognise that they exist. It is very good when the opposing sides in a conflict can try to meet each other halfway. This happens quite often. The only way to be able to see and understand the other side is to maintain an impartial and holistic view, which we always strive for.

wohnpartner grew out of the service offices for municipal housing complexes, which already provided a range of relevant services. What was taken over, and what makes wohnpartner different from its predecessor?

Claudia Huemer: We adopted different team approaches, some of which were more highly developed than others. Mediation was relatively advanced in the 10th district – thanks to my personal influence. Community work was more refined in other parts of the city because staff there placed a greater focus on this. We brought all of this knowledge on board because we took over nearly all of the staff. We standardised and refined the vast pool of knowledge, and then shared it. Our department of professional development and quality management plays a very important role in our knowledge work. In conflict mediation, we also developed our own method that has since earned us a great deal of respect in the field. We also do this in our community work. Here, though, we could exchange more with other institutions in the field, and I would like to see that. I think that we could also make contributions here because some things work differently in our areas of responsibility. I also think that three- to five-year processes often do not work with residents in municipal housing. We need more intensive support and service. In community work, one sometimes assumes a relatively emancipated and educated population that is motivated to participate in community initiatives and the like. We see other kinds of people, and things take longer.

Should processes at wohnpartner be designed with a longer horizon?

Claudia Huemer: Yes, especially where we can see good progress like at Karl-Wrba-Hof in the 10th district. We took over the centre site there in 2006. It is now 2014, and we have been seeing success with the work at the residents' activity centre for one and a half years. A large number of people are now involved. But we often need quite a bit more stamina and patience to reach this stage. And more attempts and phases where we can say that the time is not right. Other players may come onto the scene six months later. Then we can try again. One of our big advantages is that we can create continuity.

Something else that I would like to emphasise is that our various teams have seen similar but also different successes and challenges in our collaboration with the Wiener Wohnen facility management service. And we have learned a great deal from this. I think that the transformation from the municipal offices to wohnpartner was also a learning experience. We are trying to change things where we can. It was important to come to a working agreement with Wiener Wohnen, and this agreement has now been in force for a number of years. We have changed, Wiener Wohnen has changed, and we now also want to review our agreement. There is development potential. It was the basis for cooperation between these two institutions. We are sometimes successful, and there is sometimes room for improvement.

Wiener Wohnen has come to the same conclusion. An open exchange is very important. We are both working in the same area, but with different approaches.

Does this also include the networking pillar?

Claudia Huemer: Yes, a lot has changed here, and the quality has improved considerably. I began in the 10th district in 2001, and working with the facility management office was challenging in the first years.

Things improved on a personal and individual level, each team arranged things in its own way. The quality difference is that there is now a commitment to collaboration at the structural and organisational level. With the changes that are now taking place at Wiener Wohnen as an organisation, it may also be necessary to renew or adapt the working agreement.

What do you think that wohnpartner's work will consist of in future? What potential is there, and what could the next five years bring?

Claudia Huemer: I hope that we will continue to have the resources we need for our work – if we do, we will be able to develop further. One good and interesting development is peer mediation, which is being applied by more and more teams. Here, the focus is on viewing schools as a part of community work in an interdisciplinary approach. We have not yet emphasised this because schools are not our immediate area of responsibility. In community outreach projects in Berlin that I visited five or six years ago on assignment from the 10th district, schools were a key focal point for the neighbourhood. I then realised that schools do not play this role for us, unlike in other European cities. This may be because our schools are organised differently.

We are now bringing about change with our current approach of communicating that schools are closely related to living, the social space, and municipal housing. I find this very exciting and believe that we can do a lot of good with this approach and our resources. We expect to see things change in the municipal housing complexes in the neighbourhoods where we include the schools in our community work. It will open up new approaches, parents can be reached through the schools, and they will then perhaps participate in community work. We could also tap into a new target group, so to speak.

Our work must be coordinated with the team with regards to the questions of “Who do we want to reach?” and “Can we motivate other people?”. In terms of conflict resolution, I am confident that we have developed our co-mediation models including bilingual offerings relatively well. We can of course always improve, but I also don't think that we can invent something entirely new in this field.

We have also discovered new approaches in community work. On Bodenstedtgasse in the 21st district, neighbours were able to participate in the process of space redesign for the first time. This was a first “test balloon” that represents just one area of activity.

Another area of development is the mandates we have received in some social housing complexes. This is still a limited area of activity, but I can imagine it growing. But we first have to build up a reputation in these complexes. Non-profit builders and the residents in these complexes see non-profit housing as being different

from municipal housing, but the work that we do for municipal housing could also function there.

The residents' activity centres are also proving to be increasingly popular, and are becoming social meeting places in the municipal housing complexes. Demand for “traditional social work” will grow here. There are a number of different signs that the residents' activity centres will become places to go with questions and needs of all kinds, as they already are to a certain extent now. We have to consider how we interact with clients who only have very limited resources at the moment – financial and otherwise. When we cannot cover their needs alone, we have to find cooperation partners.

Any concluding words?

Claudia Huemer: The commitment, creativity, satisfaction, and pride of our employees is what makes our work so effective. To maintain this high level of quality, we have to take good care of our people. And we have to continue offering all of our accompanying measures, from training to supervision. This will guarantee the quality of our work.

Diversity and variety in a growing international city

From conflict resolution to competence centre

by Christoph Stoik

Before the establishment of wohnpartner, there was a political and professional reflex to concentrate on conflict resolution work in the municipal housing complexes.

Without systematically evaluating the factors behind conflicts, this approach was not only unprofessional, but also not particularly effective.

The purely symptomatic response to neighbourhood and courtyard use conflicts created the impression that municipal housing complexes were particularly prone to conflicts, more so than other forms of housing. For this reason, the following questions were posed when wohnpartner was set up: What are the causes of conflicts in municipal housing complexes, and what should be done with the results of an analysis? How can people be helped to develop and apply their own competences in ensuring good community relations in municipal housing? How can harmonious coexistence be improved in municipal housing? And: How can the positive qualities of social housing in Vienna be preserved? This final question is a particular challenge, especially because the level of diversity is increasing in the growing multicultural city that is Vienna. More and more people from different backgrounds are living in municipal housing. And there is the question of how affordable homes can be maintained in a growing city, and of how social disparities should be handled in Vienna and in municipal housing. How can social variety be maintained in municipal housing when the supply of affordable flats in Vienna is shrinking?

Community work is a way to find answers to these questions. Together with the affected individuals, work is undertaken to maintain and improve the quality of life in municipal housing.

A key aspect of this is improved communication between the people in these complexes. Another is ensuring that the interests of the residents are heard, for example when designing a courtyard or communicating with responsible agencies. Over the past five years, wohnpartner has become a contact point for the interests of the people in municipal housing, an institution that helps people take action and contribute. wohnpartner has the potential to become the primary competence centre for the development of social housing in Vienna. To successfully master these growing challenges, it is important for an organisation like wohnpartner to continue actively approaching the residents in municipal housing, and to also sometimes adopt critical positions in public discourse.

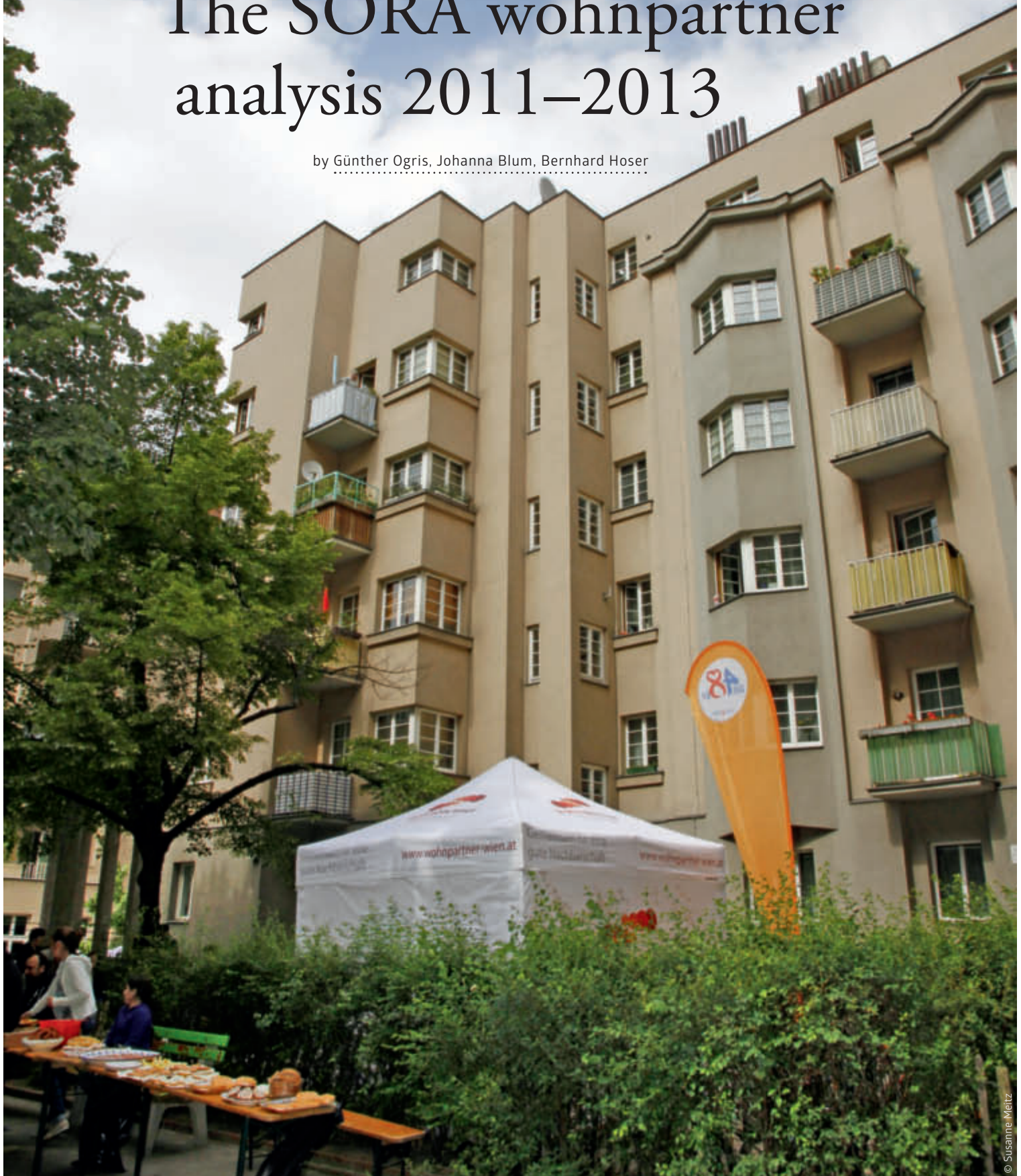


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"Thank God that wohnpartner knocked on my door."

The SORA wohnpartner analysis 2011–2013

by Günther Ogris, Johanna Blum, Bernhard Hoser



Today, Vienna is a world leading city in terms of quality of living. But less than 100 years ago, things were very different: The city was a place of mass poverty and extremely precarious living conditions. The letting of beds to labourers on an hourly basis, homelessness, and far too many people sharing many of the small two-room apartments were the order of the day for the majority of the population.

Red Vienna reacted to this situation with the first Viennese municipal housing construction programme so that the poor populace, including many first- and second-generation immigrants, could live in decent flats. The city administration launched an ambitious construction programme in September 1923. Some 25,000 new flats were to be built in municipal complexes in just five years to relieve the dire shortage of apartments for the working class.

This was the birth of municipal housing construction in Vienna. Today, there are 220,000 municipal flats that are home to around a half a million of Vienna's residents.

With the city's population now growing again after a long period of stagnation, it is time to call this historic achievement to mind. This change was brought about first by refugees from different parts of the former Yugoslavia, later by immigrants from the new EU member states, and currently also by a positive birth rate and increasing rural-urban migration.

Vienna is an attractive city where people are looking for a good education, jobs, and a high quality of life. On the other hand, Austria has been experiencing a troubling real wage trend since the middle of the 1990s. Especially people in the lower half of the wage scale have suffered substantial real wage declines since 1995 (Social Report 2012, BMASK), while the economic growth of the past 20 years has, with few exceptions, only benefited the wealthy and the upper fifth of the income pyramid.

This income disparity is particularly marked in the cities. And this means that Vienna has an enormous social challenge to tackle. It must not only find novel strategies for new construction, it must also adapt its existing properties.

The development of real wages and the effects of the international financial crisis have also left their mark on Vienna's municipal housing. On the one hand, sociodemographic statistics show an education boom. Nearly one fourth (23 per cent) of the residents in municipal housing graduated from secondary school, and around 9 per cent have a post-secondary degree. On the other, over one third (37 per cent) of the municipal housing residents live in households at the risk of poverty.

The municipal residential complexes also feature a great deal of diversity. People of different generations and origins and with different needs and interests all share a common living environment. The Vienna city administration established *wohnpartner* in 2010 to anchor modern community work in Vienna's municipal housing complexes. The goal of *wohnpartner* is to increase the quality of living for the residents through conflict resolution, community work, and networking. At so-called focus locations, *wohnpartner* employs community work in a targeted manner to promote dialogue between residents, to motivate residents to organise themselves, and to get residents to take initiative. The communication and participation structures that are established through such projects are to be taken over and managed by the residents after *wohnpartner's* engagement ends.

SORA research

SORA accompanied *wohnpartner* from 2011 to 2013 to assess the quality and effects of this community work and to provide scientifically founded input for further development. The focus of this accompanying research changed each year. In the first year, the focus was on empowering residents and motivating them to participate. In the second year, the focus was on building self-sustaining structures. And in the third year, the action competence and capacity of the residents was examined.

This research was conducted in four residential complexes of the City of Vienna: at Südtirolerhof, 1040; at Karl-Wrba-Hof, 1100; at Ernest-Bevin-Hof, 1170; and at the Ruthnergasse complex, 1210 Vienna.

wohnpartner is or was active in these complexes as part of its focus projects. A residents' activity centre was also set up on Ruthnergasse during the research period.

SORA employed a combination of methods in its research to adequately address the diverse and complex issues:

- An analysis of population data to determine the resident structure
- An analysis of *wohnpartner* documents and working materials
- Participatory observation at events such as tenant assemblies, multiplier meetings, and festivals
- Qualitative interviews with *wohnpartner* employees, residents, and representatives of cooperation partners
- Standardised panel surveys of residents (405 residents at the target complexes were personally interviewed over a period of three years)

The results of the accompanying research were systematically incorporated into the quality improvement process of *wohnpartner* in a series of workshops.

Resident diversity

The structure of the residents in municipal housing is changing as a result of the “life cycle” of these complexes. This “life cycle” is determined by the flat sizes, the period of construction, allocation management, and the associated structure of the residents who first move into the buildings.

Long-time residents often play an important role in the community work of wohnpartner. The residents who are active and who can be called upon to engage in volunteer work – a key target group for wohnpartner at its focus complexes – are people over 50 years of age. This is because they have the most available time, and because they are particularly sensitive to problems and conflicts. These people can often be relied upon for long-term commitments.

This group of actively committed residents rarely includes other groups such as young families, youths, children, migrants, or new tenants. In light of this, wohnpartner works hard to ensure that this does not cause its efforts to be one-sided, disregarding or excluding other resident groups from participation.

However, this inclusivity is difficult to realise in light of the unequal participation, as well as because of the varying expectations that the residents have of wohnpartner. The efforts of wohnpartner on behalf of certain groups of residents bothers other groups of residents. For example, the daycare services provided in the complexes for children and youths can be interpreted by older residents as wohnservice putting the interests of these younger people ahead of their own.

Action competence a cornerstone of participation

Action competence enables self-organised action, even when the framework conditions are unclear (Weinert 1999, Jung 2010). Action competence includes the necessary cognitive, motivational, and social requirements for successful learning and action. For example, these include general problem-solving skills, critical thinking, subject-specific knowledge, a realistic and positive self image, self regulation, values orientations, social skills, and the intention to act.

The resident surveys identified three groups with varying degrees of action competence and with widely different degrees of participation:

- Residents with a high level of competence: This is a small group that especially includes people who are already active.
- Residents with average action competence: Most residents are in this group. Residents with average action competence are generally not active, and are not highly motivated to participate for a variety of reasons.

- Residents with low action competence: This small group of residents is explicitly opposed to active participation, but has high expectations for “outside” help.

wohnpartner’s work promotes action competence

Active participation, organisation, and contribution efforts are limited to a small group of continually active persons. Persons with an above-average level of action competence are active especially frequently. Their motivations for participating and improving the conditions in the complexes are often related directly to the immediate neighbourhood. Active residents frequently want to get to know their neighbours better, make a contribution to harmonious coexistence, and feel that volunteer work is important.

The survey showed that the active residents have a higher level of confidence in their ability to tackle new and difficult challenges. Their participation enables them to address issues they are concerned about, earns them respect from others, expands their circle of acquaintances, makes them known to a larger group of people, and motivates them to engage in further activities. All of these aspects affirm the value of their efforts and increase their competence.

This means that wohnpartner enables these people to develop their own competence and gain (positive) experience.

wohnpartner promotes good neighbourly relations

Roughly nine of ten respondents are familiar with at least one wohnpartner event, and roughly half visited at least one of the events that were held in 2013.

The residents with action competence are the primary target group for activities that offer good opportunities for passive participation (such as block parties). They make an important contribution to the success of community work because the audience itself contributes to the perception of community and togetherness in the housing complex.

People with average action competence are not motivated to participate actively for different reasons. The primary reason is time limitations. They often have their hands full with family and work obligations. Some individuals can be won for a limited time for specific activities that they are personally interested in.

wohnpartner reduces uncertainty

People need a certain degree of action competence to be motivated to participate. People with a low degree of competence do not feel that they are qualified or able to participate in activities. This is because the people in question have little contact with their neighbours, and their interaction is limited to simple greetings. The more



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these residents feel that they are isolated, the less likely they are to attend events – they withdraw and remain where they feel safe.

It is very difficult to motivate residents with low action competence to participate at all. But it is exactly these residents who see the efforts of *wohnpartner*, Wiener Wohnen, the tenants' advisory committee, and the active residents to ensure harmonious community relations as especially important and who have an especially high opinion of the effects of this work. It seems that these efforts offer these people a sense of security and promote integration. The responsibilities of these contributors also effectively address the need for support.

Potential for targeted participation

There is certainly potential for more participation in the examined complexes, but a major or continuous increase in participation is unlikely. Roughly one fourth of the respondents said that they could imagine participating in events in future, most of them by attending. Respondents who have participated in events in the past are also more likely to consider attending more events in future.

It is this "audience" that can also be motivated to participate in specific projects or activities when *wohnpartner* responds appropriately to the motivation and needs of these residents. Residents are more likely to consider taking part in future events when the events are fun, when the participants can get to know their neighbours, and when they can contribute to the health of the community by taking part. The desire to organise future events with others depends on the degree of fun, the gaining of new experiences, meeting other people, and to what extent neighbours are helped.

The tenants' advisory committee

As the focus projects continue, the tenants' advisory committee is turning into a central communication platform for the community work. The building of tenable and lasting relationships with these central figures among the residents can also make decisions more difficult, however, and can lead to conflicts when *wohnpartner* withdraws. *wohnpartner* expects and demands continued commitment.

The members of the tenants' advisory committee exercise their duties in different manners, and this has different effects on the focus projects. It is especially important to pay attention to group dynamics when constituting the tenants' advisory committee. The impression of a "closed group" can prevent other residents from participating.

Hurdles for *wohnpartner* to overcome

The objective of community work is to enable the affected persons to develop self-help measures and to then gradually implement these measures. This requires active participation by the affected persons, in some cases at their own initiative (for information on community work, see especially Rohrmoser 2004a or Oelschlägel 2011). In psychological terms, the application of the principle of community work is based on the principles of competence and self-efficacy.

The changing composition of the residents in municipal housing does not make the community work of *wohnpartner* easier. It can be assumed that many new residents have fewer personal, social, and economic resources for active participation.

As a result, these changes in the resident structure of municipal housing complexes make low-threshold methods of community work all the more important. The following low-threshold principles are moving to the forefront in the activities of wohnpartner: addressing residents in their everyday lives and based on their concrete needs, participation in the design of projects, and an orientation towards the resources and competences of the residents.

Continuous community organising needed

The established structures will always need “guidance” and support from wohnpartner. The goal of creating fully self-sustaining structures that eliminate the need for active residents to come to wohnpartner will only be achieved in exceptional cases.

Even the active residents do not want to take on full responsibility for the continuation of the existing activities. They expect or request the continued involvement of wohnpartner, which means that wohnpartner should provide time and resources in the form of assistance and the provision of space and equipment.

The results of the accompanying research indicate that a complete withdrawal from the housing complex will result in the dissolution of the established structures. This means that the continuation of the activities will necessitate further involvement by wohnpartner in many cases.

wohnpartner must consider the consequences of its activities in terms of the future allocation of its resources and in terms of whether or not the activities can be continued before beginning community work projects. Withdrawal is not the end of the focus project, but must be seen as a parallel activity in all phases. This means that withdrawal must be designed as a successive and gradual process that must be integrated properly into the focus project.

wohnpartner seeks to assume no tasks that the tenants can handle themselves. But an individual’s capacity to take care of something can be very different, and is not always readily apparent. This means that the staff members must identify it in each specific situation.

Self-efficacy is an expression of subjectively perceived competence. Thus, self-efficacy is a prerequisite for a willingness to learn, motivation, and tenacity, and a foundation for identity and self-worth. The development of the latter is expedited by successes stemming from an individual’s own abilities and efforts. The definition and achievement of realistic short-term goals and stepping stones is important for the development of self-efficacy. Good opportunities must be found for participating residents to take on tasks, and these tasks must have an appropriate scope. This means that the need for assistance in community work can come at different times, and can vary in intensity. wohnpartner must carefully consider and specify relevant success criteria for community work. The accompanying research shows that the establishment of self-sustaining structures

and the withdrawal from focus complexes are only feasible criteria in some cases.

wohnpartner works

SORA’s research came to a positive conclusion: The work of wohnpartner has the desired effects. Support for tenants’ advisory committee members generates long-term commitment. wohnpartner’s community outreach in the complexes increases the action competence of the involved residents. The events instil a sense of the importance of good community relations in the participants. And even those who do not take part in events gain an increased sense of security. Isolation, uncertainty, and anonymity are reduced. wohnpartner takes sensible measures to promote harmony and a sense of community in the complexes and to strengthen democratic culture by promoting involvement.



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Johanna Blum studied sociology and political science in Vienna and has been conducting research in the areas of youth, work, and living at SORA since 2008.



Bernhard Hoser studied sociology at the universities of Vienna and Malta. His focuses at SORA are living and quality of life, as well as political research.

Help with finding solutions

Mediation with individuals in psychological crisis

by Elmar Türk

Few mediators are prepared to work with psychologically ill individuals in the resolution of conflicts. Many experts say that mediation is not even possible in such situations. Still, people must overcome conflicts when dealing with their fellow human beings, and assistance often brings the most benefits where it is needed the most.

The focus is on achieving what is possible, and small and slow successes can be attained. Because neighbours are fellow human beings, no matter what their state of mind.

Especially people with lasting psychological problems are at risk of stigmatisation, exclusion, and social relegation. In-patient care is expensive and often does little to help, because it fosters dependence as opposed to enabling at least some degree of self-determination. Not everyone is aware of the fact that social housing also serves a political function.

The perceptions that make sense to the psychologically impaired are usually difficult to comprehend from the outside. There are irritations and fears that are generally seen as “normal” when dealing with such individuals: Am I in danger? Is sensible communication possible? Am I being taken advantage of? What will happen to me when panic or aggression arises? Will I be at fault if I do too much or too little?

Some mediators expect to enforce “self-evident rights”. But mediation must be multipartial and support all parties to a conflict. All interests must be taken into account so far as they are not illegal. A significant challenge in situations where one party is seen as ill. Here, one must deal with the phenomenon of psychological crises.

Part of the training provided to wohnpartner employees addresses the emotional reactions of mediators to psychologically impaired individuals. These reactions are analysed on the basis of the following questions: What are my own ideas about psychological illnesses? Where do these ideas come from? How can I assess them? And what ideas are helpful for successful mediation? The mediators must also respect their own boundaries. When do I feel threatened, and what actions can I take in such situations?

A diagnostic approach that offers a false sense of security and that prevents the mediator from viewing the individual as a full-fledged person in a difficult state of mind is less helpful. Mediators acting on behalf of wohnpartner work to help the involved parties find their own solutions in such complex situations. A balance must be struck between going along and confronting, and calming when necessary – the conflict parties and the mediator himself or herself.



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Active resident participation is crucial

Boundaries of wohnpartner's work

by Josef Cser and Walther Hohenbalken

wohnpartner sees boundaries not only as accepted limitations in areas of responsibility delegated by contractive authority or as the end point of a development process. Youth work and traditional case work are handled by a large number of organisations whose competence and authority have never been called into question. At the same time, wohnpartner often goes a step further and tries to motivate these institutions to work in municipal housing complexes and to participate in sensible collaboration projects.

Because learning organisations – like wohnpartner – must be open enough to accept suggestions and input from outside their area of activity. In projects that wohnpartner completes with a wide array of cooperation partners such as adult education centres, T-Systems, youth centres, schools, Fem und Men, the city park service, retiree clubs, Ökosoziales Forum, Volkshilfe, MA 17, Caritas, the Public Employment Service, and KÖR, work focuses not only on achieving the project goals, but also on working together and discovering new perspectives and finding new solutions for a variety of problems.

Since it was established five years ago, wohnpartner has undergone a process of growth that has expanded its original boundaries – in territorial, resource, responsibility, and conceptual terms. Its “spatial” scope and the resources it has committed have grown considerably through the establishment of further offices and residents’ activity centres. Now, in each wohnpartner territory, there is at least one additional location besides the main office, and residents’ activity centres have been set up in four different districts.

The expansion of responsibilities and growth of wohnpartner’s work that have taken place over the past years will continue into the future. Because the reflection on the organisation’s work through external and internal evaluations naturally and intentionally results in changes and new developments. The developments to date will only be mentioned briefly here, as they are described very well in other articles in this issue. The development of wohnpartner’s concrete activities focused both on developing new forms of conflict resolution and community work that are sometimes closely related and that have no clear boundaries, for example in conflicts about courtyard use. These forms include the outreach work and the *Vienna and the Ziegelböhm* and *Goethehof – between village life and world metropolis* history projects, to mention just a few examples from 2014.

This expansion has also included designing the work in the residents’ activity centres. Work with volunteers is continuously being reviewed and adapted. The training course for tenant representatives helps wohnpartner develop support measures for other volunteers and active residents that vary depending on the responsibilities that are taken on by these individuals.

“When I cross the boundary, I slip into a different role, into the form of another who sees everything, including himself, with different eyes and who sometimes discovers things that he would have overlooked in his previous form.”

Milo Dor, author, born in
in Budapest, † 2005



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The responsibilities that are delegated at the residents' activity centres depend largely on the needs and interests of the respective residents. Through their activities, the residents make a key contribution to shaping and ensuring the overall success of wohnpartner's efforts. Because of this, wohnpartner's work with the residents must continuously be assessed, and new aspects that arise must be taken into account. Participation opportunities in highly formal structures such as the tenants' advisory committee must be supplemented with opportunities that allow engagement with less demand for time and social obligation. The involvement of the residents in conflict resolution and in community work is extremely important in the activities of wohnpartner. And this also brings us to the most important boundary. wohnpartner's work cannot be successful without the active involvement of the residents.



Josef Cser, Director of wohnpartner



*Walther Hohenbalken,
Professional Development and Quality Management*

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Living satisfaction

Orientation towards social space

by Bernd Rohrauer

According to Wolfgang Hinte (2009, 21), the goal of social space orientation is “to contribute to shaping living conditions so that the people there (in the complex) can live with (greater) satisfaction in accordance with their needs.” This also corresponds to wohnpartner’s objective in its efforts to increase the living satisfaction of the residents in municipal housing.

However, social space orientation should not be confused with community work, because dealing with the social space is a fundamental prerequisite in all of the areas that wohnpartner is active. It begins with an awareness of various spatial logic factors that influence the constitution of social processes. Working from this basis, professional social space orientation concepts attempt to identify principles on which professional action can be based. In this, social space is not reduced to the idea of a “container space” (such as a housing complex). The term encompasses more than just the territorial aspects. The fact that wohnpartner employees visit the residential complexes in their work, for example in their outreach activities, does not necessarily mean that they are oriented towards the social space.

(Re)discovering the space

The question of what exactly this social space is is difficult to answer, and often raises further questions. It is related to the so-called “spatial turn” (Döring/Thielmann 2008, 7), which refers to the overcoming of a “spatial obliviousness” in the social sciences. The associated paradigm change in the perception of social reality has been under way especially since the 1990s. The conclusion was drawn that space could no longer be viewed as a separate dimension that is independent of social reality and a dimension “in which” things “happen”. It became clear that social reality varies depending on the conceptual location of the space. That this is not purely a philosophical or scientific discussion became clear by the 2000s as spatial logic considerations found their way into socio-political programmes and into the concepts of social services such as wohnpartner.

Social problems are increasingly being linked to spatial phenomena, and give rise to questions like the following: Where and how are social problems distributed? What interactions arise from this? Where does displacement occur and what causes it? What

power structures and logic permeate and shape space? What role does the relationship between social action and structures play in the production of space? What mutual influences do the relationships between local, supraregional, national, transnational, and global processes have? Where do social media such as facebook and virtual realities such as open, network-based electronic gaming worlds fit into this?

More recent terms such as “subjective/objective security”, federal programmes like *Soziale Stadt* (social city) in Germany, institutions such as SAM-Flex in Vienna, and the activities of wohnpartner are the result of presuppositions based in spatial theory. The local phenomena that gave rise to these developments are also the consequences of socio-spatial processes. Various socio-spatial presuppositions can be found in different guiding programmes. Professional socio-spatial action requires sensitivity and reflexivity. It attempts to identify and understand all factors involved in space production. Once this is accomplished, professional social and socio-spatial action must be coordinated and the specific methodological requirements identified.

Spatial perspectives at wohnpartner

In simple terms, two schools of thought regarding social space orientation have crystallised in practice according to Spatscheck/Wolf-Ostermann (2009). The first examines phenomena in a housing complex from the perspective of social space planning with the goal of designing social aid as effectively as possible. Socio-demographic data (such as age and level of education) and a quantitative approach are key focuses in this approach. The second school of thought seeks to discover, analyse, and change social spaces in terms of how social conditions can be shaped to facilitate the process of social development. In this, the focus is placed clearly on the subjective perspectives of the residents.

Both of these schools of thought guide the actions of wohnpartner from an organisational perspective.

The first relates to the external view of local spaces, to the organisational proximity to the city administration and the requirements arising from this, to the principle of resource orientation (from the provider perspective), and to the attitude of inclusivity and multipartiality. The fact that wohnpartner is active in different residential complexes throughout Vienna and that it can relate these different complexes to each other from a centralised spatial perspective is also important. This resource should not be underestimated in terms of differentiating between needs that are relevant in local spatial terms and that are relevant city wide. This allows mutual influences that are relevant at the supraregional

level to be assessed. Analyses are also provided that make it easier to coordinate existing resources and to implement and network additional resources.

The second school of thought is based on the principles of resource orientation (from the motivational perspective), life world orientation, and needs orientation. Interventions are based on the subjective needs, interests, motives, and ideas of the residents – for example in the resolution of conflicts, in the outreach work of wohnpartner, in training and the promotion of resident engagement, and in the work with residents' activity centres. The life world orientation ensures that the views of and the generation of meaning by the residents are perceived and taken seriously. The competence of the involved parties in the production of social space is based on a constructivist approach, unlike the first perspective.

Reconciliation between the structural and action dimensions in the (re)production of social reality

The application of both of the described schools of thought creates a unique, organisation-specific environment in which self-sustaining structures – in other words empowering and delegating to residents – become possible and in which the offerings tend more towards the provision of services and assistance. In its socio-spatial approach, wohnpartner sees the conditions in municipal housing as historically contingent projections of the interaction between structures and actions. The existing structures play a key role in shaping the possibilities for action and behaviour in the complexes. The possibilities for action also include the opportunity to change structures. One example of this is the action competence of the tenant representatives. The structural dimension provides the formal framework, which facilitates and standardises the activities of the tenant representatives. The action dimension refers to the actions of the tenant representatives, which are bounded by the legitimised structure of the tenants co-determination statutes. The action dimension has a particularly marked effect on the structural dimension where the activities of the tenant representatives have an influence on the decision to amend the tenant co-determination statutes.

Experts interacting: The role of professional experts in work with the experts of their life worlds

The goal of improving the quality of life in municipal housing with the active involvement of the residents implies sensitivity for the relevant framework structures. This is a fundamental prerequisite

for successful participation by residents in the design process, which expands their subjective and communal action competence. The objective of seeking improvements in accordance with the needs of the affected individuals also implies the necessity of understanding and addressing the needs of the residents. The question of what people need to feel happy makes clear that this feeling of happiness is dependent on the subjective perceptions of these individuals as “experts of their life world”. Here, the concept of “wanting” is also the key factor for Wolfgang Hinte (2009). The professional actions must be oriented towards the “will” of the affected persons. That the will of the residents in the municipal housing complexes is as diverse as the residents themselves comes as no surprise and is reflected in the day-to-day work of wohnpartner. The professional standards and competence of the wohnpartner staff become apparent here, especially when recognising and respecting the many subjective perceptions, accompanying negotiation processes, and balancing out existing power structures.

The growing expertise won after five years of “field work” is leading to an increase in the importance and quality of the intermediary function between residents and the city administration. When assessing needs in municipal housing, qualitative field work is a key complement to the external socio-demographic view outlined above. This allows the perception of the space to be based not only on statistical data, but also on the living perspectives of the affected residents. The following quote from Norbert Ortmann (1996, 29), shows how relevant this perception is for the work of wohnpartner:

“The preferences of the residents of the neighbourhood are hardly reflected in the official statistics. Knowing these preferences is an important prerequisite for identifying needs and demands and for coordinating work in the social space.”

Social space orientation and the three pillars of wohnpartner's work

How is the social space accounted for in the three core areas of wohnpartner's work, namely community work, conflict resolution, and networking?

Community work has always been closely related to (social) space, and has always been poor in defining its own boundaries: What is community work? Where and how is it located? How can it be localised and defined? In dealing with this question in the most fundamental sense, community work needs feedback from the social space. Aside from this, community work as a working principle according to Oelschlägl (2001) – as it is seen by wohnpartner – addresses a highly constructivist dimension of space

production. Residents are given a great deal of authority in shaping space (in open-ended processes), for example through education.

Conflict resolution also takes place in a social-space context. What environmental factors, such as structural features in connection with noise, are relevant? What discussions are seen (especially as fuelled by the media), for example in terms of cultural attributions? Where are conflicts located, and what space-related relationships/clusterings can be seen? What needs can be seen, and what social/social space problems can be underlying causes?

wohnpartner's third pillar, networking, focuses on aspects such as identifying and mobilising (socio-spatial) resources for the benefit of the target group – for example through cooperation projects with educational and social institutions. In this, it is important to identify need relationships that arise in the form of social problems in the local space but that are not caused in this local space. This is key in determining whether external resources are needed to address the problems. Realising that space is permeated by mesosociological and macrosociological processes makes the importance of networking beyond the boundaries of the local space apparent.

Is social space orientation a professional competence of wohnpartner?

In light of the current trend of depicting social work as “social space oriented”, the goal of this article is to show that social space orientation at wohnpartner has a different meaning than the adaptation of one-dimensional, action-oriented professional concepts and the hegemonic propagation of specific concepts. wohnpartner strives to relate the daily needs and issues of its work to the vigorous interdisciplinary discourse. This requires a reflexive analysis, professional foundation work, and professional development. This creates potential for a transfer between practice and theory through academic networking.

Social space orientation at wohnpartner is not a fixed professional concept, but a dynamic process of continuously assessing theories and practice in context. In this, inconsistencies create new challenges. They shed light on the qualities of the object of discussion, which is too dynamic and complex to be put into a box – in the sense of a container space approach. The object of discussion is social reality. The discussion articulates the action-based process of understanding.

www.sozialraum.de/the-socio-spatial-paradigm-in-social-work.php

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Empowerment

Between autonomy and guidance

by Angelika Schäfer-Weibold

Empowerment has its roots in social work in the USA and means giving someone the power to do something (see Heriger, 2010). The concept has spread to many different areas of social work, especially community work, and has been an important principle for wohnpartner from the beginning.

This general trend in social work has also been the object of criticism on the basis of the sometimes excessively high expectations that were placed on the empowerment approach (see Staub-Bernasconi, 2007, Bakic, Diebäcker, Hammer 2013). Empowerment at wohnpartner entails the principles of resource orientation, self-directed action, the assumption of responsibility, participation, and the promotion of self-determination among residents. In wohnpartner's work – both conflict resolution and community work – empowerment is also an attitude held by the staff in all areas. However, empowerment sometimes entails hurdles and challenges.

In historical terms, empowerment has also played an important role in political developments. In the sense of participation, one focus is processes that are designed to enable people to have an influence on political decisions, resources, and rights. The goal is to allow people to lead self-determined and independent lives while actively participating in society to the greatest possible extent. Academic literature (see Heriger, 2010) often notes that development success is not sustainable without empowerment.

Process facilitation and participation

Participation is designed to help disadvantaged population groups, especially those who are socially weaker, to take initiative and to have their voice be heard in social and political processes. They should be able to act independently as advocates of their own interests, and should be perceived as such. Identification with these interests and the development of abilities and individual causes are intended to promote the sustainable development of personal goals for the community good. Through their daily work, facilitators of such processes like wohnpartner employees assist and motivate residents in the discovery of their own strengths and resources. In this way, these residents can achieve goals such as taking initiative and self-determination. The work with residents is always part education and encourages the development of skills such as networking, negotiation, and the assertion of interests in democratic processes.

Social workers and also wohnpartner employees are often tempted to focus on problems and deficits of the clients and residents, or of the social space. But this can cause imbalance. Because when residents are to a certain degree dependent on employees who “want to help”, existing power disparities are more likely to be maintained than changed. Empowerment requires a relationship with the residents as equals, with respect and appreciation and taking the needs and interests of the residents seriously. Process facilitators try to encourage and motivate and to help to identify and activate (sometimes hidden) resources without being patronising, and without dispensing platitudes or forcing tips or solutions on their clients. This work can take the form of advisory meetings and the moderation of negotiation processes, or can be support for resident initiatives and projects. wohnpartner's employees must

have a firm knowledge of many different methods for this, including active dialogue, questioning and observing, round table discussions, planning sessions, and workshops. Methods from art and cultural work are also applied when the clients and residents are considered to be experts in their own situations and strategies are to be developed to change or improve the conditions in question. These methods are all open-ended. This means that the process facilitators have no result in mind and suggest no result during the process. wohnpartner employees act as moderators, and provide their methodological know-how. They simply design the settings and framework conditions so that the residents can achieve their goals. Goals can be adjusted or changed and the needs and interests or even the path to be taken can also be repeated or changed throughout the process by way of regular coaching sessions, meetings, reflection, and feedback about the methods being applied. The focus here is on the interaction, dynamics, and process orientation.

At wohnpartner, all of these processes are applied under the principle of impartiality and inclusivity. This includes approaching all involved parties and accounting for their needs and interests. Empowerment is also necessary here – in the form of examining the strengths and resources of individuals or interest groups and the fostering of their ability to find their own solutions. If the

involvement of disadvantaged individuals or groups is necessary due to clear power disparities, wohnpartner calls this reflective partiality. Under this approach, the affected persons are given more attention for a time during the process. This temporary support is also intended to enable the residents to discover their own resources and find solutions.

Possibilities and challenges

Empowerment focuses on a resource orientation in every sense. This is not limited to the personal resources of individual residents, but also includes material resources in the form of financial capital or indoor and outdoor space in a complex.

For example, wohnpartner renders assistance by providing rooms for various events such as assemblies and mediation sessions. wohnpartner also promotes the securing of indoor and outdoor space in its community work for the purposes of empowerment. Especially common rooms and central meeting points can be used by resident groups for their own purposes. These meeting spaces also allow the exchange of opinions with like-minded people as well as interaction with people with common and diverging interests. Thus, empowerment implies the securing of space and the resulting opportunity for the self-determination and autonomy of



resident groups. Another central objective of wohnpartner is creating self-sustaining structures. One example is not only the existing common rooms in housing complexes, but also the residents' activity centres initiated by wohnpartner (see the article about residents' activity centres). Since the establishment of the residents' activity centres, the question has been what role wohnpartner should play in these meeting points. In particular, the administration of these rooms could run counter to the goals of self-determination and autonomy. This would make the desired self-sustaining structures unattainable. In an internal analysis, wohnpartner examined the possibility of transfer into independent administration, among other things. Hurdles that were identified include the associated organisational effort and the coordination of the activities in the residents' centre. The question of financing is also not entirely congruent with the goal of autonomy. Further hurdles with regards to autonomy and self-sustaining structures are generally based on assumptions as opposed to experience.

For example, wohnpartner seeks to make the residents' activity centres available to different groups in the interests of respecting and promoting diversity. But it is not known how this use would be under self-administered structures, and what displacement mechanisms would come into play, if any. Individual groups could be excluded by other groups in spatial or activity terms, even when external support is being provided. Such mechanisms are difficult to influence. This means that different activities and values present challenges. For example, how should exclusionary ideologies of interest groups be handled? If wohnpartner establishes a concept with activities, content, objectives, values, and rules, full autonomy is not really possible. On the other hand, various fears are based on assumptions. Serious disputes and conflicts can arise between groups. In such situations, guidance from a wohnpartner employee with conflict resolution expertise would seem sensible. There is also the assumption that the spaces and their fixtures could be damaged. Could this be reduced or prevented through wohnpartner presence?

And it seems that some residents would welcome the participation and regular presence of wohnpartner. One target group would possibly not use the provided space because it visits the room to see

a specific person. This target group apparently does not feel that its self-determination is limited, and takes advantage of the advice provided by wohnpartner, or simply wants to speak with wohnpartner.

For this reason, the concept of the residents' activity centres is not based on complete autonomy and self-administration. wohnpartner needs to develop alternative models such as a form of "guided autonomy" that permits a focus on the strengths and resources of the residents so as to empower them.

Residents are currently engaged in activities that involve self-sustaining structures. This means that under the framework of guided autonomy, they design projects and activities in which wohnpartner is not involved and in which wohnpartner has no design or content influence. wohnpartner provides the space, and only coordinates and administers the space in connection with such activities. wohnpartner provides an employee as a contact person to help with such self-sustaining and independently organised activities in the spirit of this "guided autonomy".

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Angelika Schäfer-Weibold, Deputy Director of Professional Development and Quality Management

Diversity isn't one-dimensional: it's multi-dimensional

wohnpartner and the European Migrant Integration Academy

by Ole Jensen

wohnpartner was one of 10 functioning practices selected for the European Migrant Integration Academy (EUMIA), an EU-funded research and training initiative targeting local stakeholders involved in integration policies in European cities. The project was carried out by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), at the University of Oxford, and the Turin-based research institute Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione (FIERI). The final academy took place at the ITC/ILO Training Centre in Turin in early 2014.¹

The 10 practices were selected from across the EU. This was a challenging task, as integration is a term with so many different meanings, and because it proved impossible to obtain a full overview of integration measures at the national level. In Austria, we ended up with a shortlist of initiatives that had been recognised as successful in the national context. What's more, wohnpartner's focus on the nexus between housing and neighbourhood management within the context of rapidly increasing immigration resonates with high-priority policy areas in many other European cities.

My own role here was that of a researcher, documenting wohnpartner's work over a five-day period in June 2013. This involved interviews at management level as well as in the different neighbourhood teams, and a tour of different housing estates. While it is difficult to summarise my findings and impressions, it seems to me

that three aspects of wohnpartner's operational approach deserve to be highlighted:

The ambition and resources to turn conflict into conversation and opportunity: Diversity is not straightforward but multi-dimensional in that it entails a range of small and large interpersonal differences – from worldviews to acceptable noise levels. Identifying conflict resolution as one of the pillars of wohnpartner's programming entails the very sound recognition that social cohesion is not about avoiding conflict, but about having the means to resolve conflict and use it as an opportunity to strengthen the local community. This is also related to wohnpartner's role in the wider integration process, as argued by Diversity Advisor Roland Engel: “wohnpartner has a role to play in creating a sense of ‘us’ at the micro-level, in the housing estates. Accordingly, the estates play a role in the integration process, and they can also provide some signposts towards what a new ‘us’ might look like in wider society.”

Diversity as an asset that informs implementation strategy and team composition: All too often, diversity is perceived as an obstacle and used to explain why things are difficult. What is important is the way in which the makeup of neighbourhood teams reflects the target population, here expressed by team leader Elena Resch: “First of all, I don't think we should talk about wohnpartner, but rather about the people wohnpartner works with. wohnpartner constantly engages with people who carry very different kinds of baggage with them. Accordingly, we have colleagues from different professional backgrounds, who have different sets of life experiences, as well as differences in culture, language, and age.”

A learning organisation: Housing and community engagement are, in many national contexts, policy areas where staff is stretched by the requirements of day-to-day demands, and where structures



Ljiljana Kojic, Team Leader, team 13_23, Christian Srienz, team 21, and Tove Raiby, Head of Professional Development and Quality Management

for processing experiences are lacking. In the wohnpartner setup, a unit of professional development and quality management provides a structure that allows staff experiences to be fed into the development of what is essentially a learning and constantly evolving organisation. As Rene Selinger put it in what were the final words of the short documentary: “It does not stand still.”

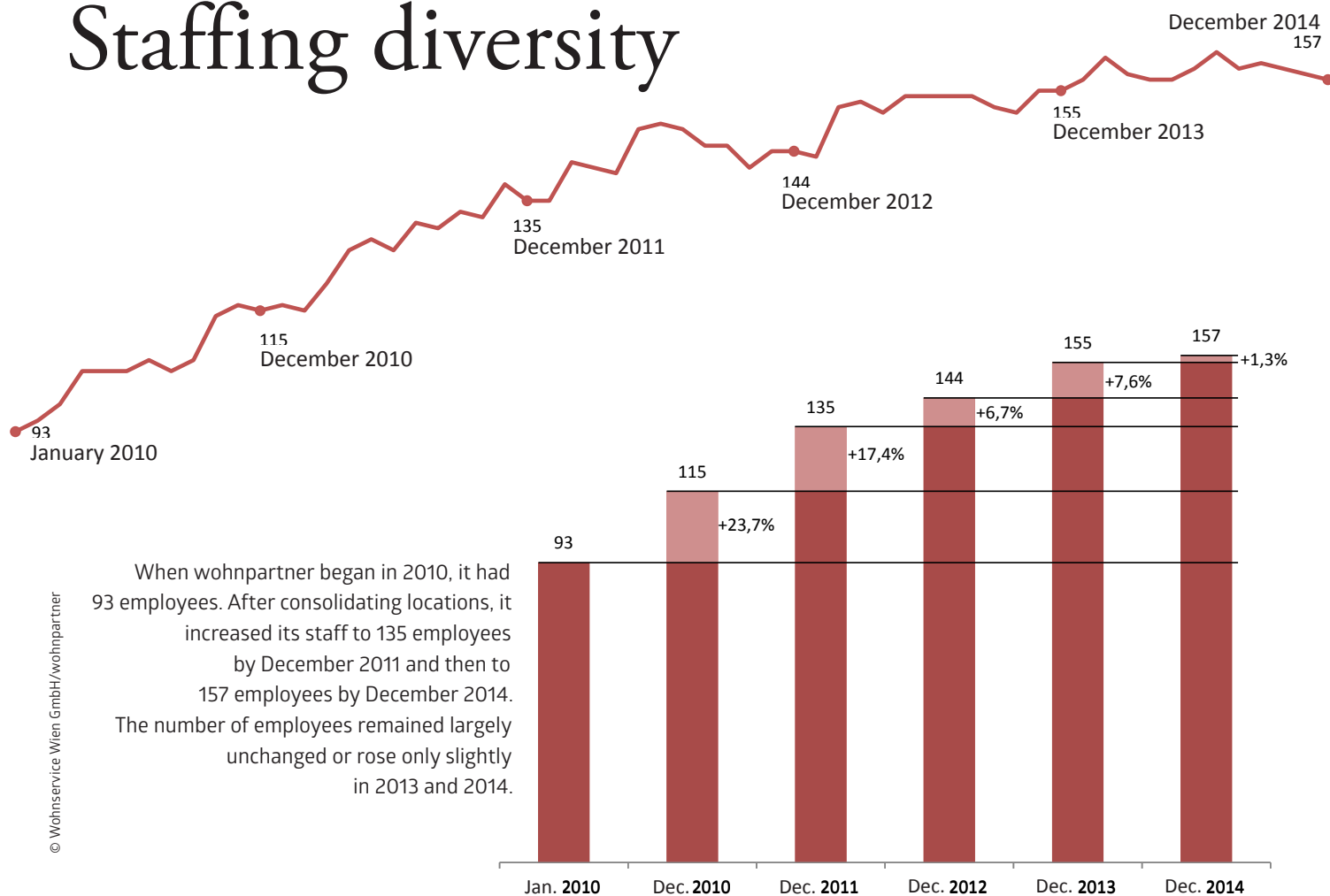
Some of these topics were also central to the Integration Academy in Turin in February 2014, which marked the conclusion of the project. All 10 functioning practices (Ljiljana Kojic and Christian Srienz from wohnpartner) as well as stakeholders from local government and NGOs from across Europe participated. Similar to wohnpartner’s reflection rounds, the academy provided a time and place for dedicated professionals from the integration field to meet, exchange ideas, and look toward potential areas of future cooperation.

- 1 For the full research report as well as the short documentary and material relating to the other functioning practices, please see the EUMIA website http://www.eu-mia.eu/content_view



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Staffing diversity



When wohnpartner began in 2010, it had 93 employees. After consolidating locations, it increased its staff to 135 employees by December 2011 and then to 157 employees by December 2014. The number of employees remained largely unchanged or rose only slightly in 2013 and 2014.

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wohnpartner pays close attention to diversity when hiring staff and putting together each of its teams and different departments in the organisation. It brings together people of different generations, genders, ethnicity, origin, languages spoken, and professions. Even at the very beginning, 40 per cent of the 97 employees at that time had a migrant background from EU and EEA countries. In addition, two-thirds of the company's employees are women, and one-third are men.

The number of employees has since risen to 157 as a response to growing interest and positive feedback from residents of municipal housing and the resulting increase in demand for support and guidance from wohnpartner. This 40.76 per cent growth is confirmation

that wohnpartner is on the right track by continuing to build teams that include multicultural staff with a variety of professional backgrounds.

In keeping with gender mainstreaming, the ratio of women to men at wohnpartner is 58 to 42 per cent. The percentage of female employees with a migrant background has remained stable, at 40 per cent, while wohnpartner has increased language diversity by adding Afrikaans. Communication takes place in 28 languages, including sign language.

And with employees aged 25 to 60, cross-generational thinking and acting is also the basis for treating its employees with respect.

by Gül Akkilic, MA, Diversity Officer at Wohnservice Wien



© Portrait: Jenny Fetz/WSW

Increasing social capital in the local environment

Volunteer involvement in municipal housing

by Bernd Rohrauer and Ulrike Freigaßner-Hauser

Volunteer work is one of wohnpartner's specialisations. That's why its understanding of volunteering is so important to the way wohnpartner coordinates its activities.

Focus on living environments and the macrosociological view

Training residents to become active volunteers makes it possible to increase local social capital and teach new ways of coping and behaving. Volunteers tend to identify with their living environment and are interested in improving community living, which makes them important sources and intermediaries for social resources and needs in the local community. Volunteers make it possible to obtain better insight into and to connect with the diverse worlds in which residents live. Residents' needs, volunteers' interests, and what motivates volunteers to participate can be just as diverse.

wohnpartner employees empower and coach residents to arrange and take advantage of independent leisure and support activities for other residents.

Concern – something that volunteers must feel in order to want to participate – plays a key role in actively shaping and co-shaping processes and structures in the social sphere. There are multiple reasons for concern, which can take the form of commitment – in places where people can take advantage of opportunities for change that are truly meaningful from the perspective of those affected. We refer to it as volunteering when this transformation into participation succeeds and residents become active for the common good. Educational and training services are developed, refined, and integrated with a focus on the living environment. “Focus on the living environment” means that services and activities are attuned to local needs, and residents are involved in designing processes from the

very beginning. Shared reflection and networking are important tools for achieving this.

Coordinating needs for improving material and social living conditions is an enormous responsibility for wohnpartner. This responsibility stems both from the contextualisation of social and social-environment needs supported by social science and from structural gaps at the mesosocial and macrosocial level. For example, “energy partners” are trained to work on poverty-related problems whose causes cannot be pinpointed to a specific location. Tutoring can also be viewed as a response to diversifying life paths, to the “loss” of the traditional nuclear family model, and to the increasing normalisation of tenuous employment. This shows how important volunteering is and how it can have a stabilising impact on society – all while reproducing existing power relationships, for better or worse. The macrosociological view is part of the social responsibility of publicly funded organisations like wohnpartner because local conditions can not only be improved by residents; they also need to be made visible and need to be worked on at a structural level.

Impact of resident support in the field

The meaning and significance of volunteering is not to replace professional support services. Instead, it aims to allow the various potentials to develop, especially the potential that arises from access to peer work. Active residents are themselves part of the target group of wohnpartner's professional services. Reasons for volunteering are directly linked to the target group's connections to the living environment. Residents volunteer in their immediate living environments, thereby bringing them closer to the living environments of the target group. The qualities of relationships between active volunteers and residents therefore differ from those between professional aides and residents. New networks of neighbours, per-



© Stefan Zamisch/WSW

sonal contacts, and even friendships form from interactions related to volunteering, which in turn expands opportunities for increasing social capital. Here are some examples of what we mean.

A cooking class led by a resident at a residents' activity centre brings people in the neighbourhood together. Older people and young parents meet. Some of the older people then offer to help the young parents mind their children, while younger people offer to go grocery shopping for those with limited mobility.

A retired teacher realises that people, especially women, whose first language isn't German, are reluctant to speak German because they are embarrassed. She offers a conversation course at the residents' activity centre so that women can learn German and practise their skills. Other interests also become apparent. A visitor gets up the courage, initially coached by wohnpartner employees, to offer a Nordic walking class. Others begin to take an interest in the cultures and languages of other residents. A cultural exchange group is created, which soon plans to organise an intercultural courtyard festival in the summer.

These types of situations aren't just imagined. They are actual processes that wohnpartner has observed through its everyday work.

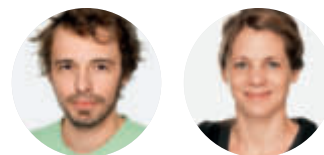
Specific features of volunteering and volunteer opportunities at wohnpartner

At the micro level, the boundaries of volunteering are constantly being expanded and adapted. Work with tenants' representatives continues to have special status – especially in terms of political

participation, which is set out in the tenant co-determination statute adopted by the City Council. In contrast to “traditional” volunteer positions, representatives' mandates are linked to the residents they represent, not to an organisation.

And something else sets them apart from traditional volunteer positions, too, which is exciting from a professional standpoint: volunteers are themselves part of wohnpartner's target group. How volunteers are involved in the organisation is an issue that has not yet been well addressed, but one that is nevertheless relevant. The issue is directly linked to the power relationships between “professionals” and “clients”. Closer examination will open up vast prospects for subject-specific advancement in terms of relationship-building, participation, and empowerment.

In this context, new potential and challenges have become apparent since the emergence of residents' activity centres because these centres in particular have a high density and diversity of volunteer involvement.



*Bernd Rohrauer and Ulrike Freigaßner-Hauser,
Professional Development and Quality Management,
Participation and Volunteering*

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Co-determination in municipal housing

The importance of the tenants' advisory committee

by Ulrike Freigaßner-Hauser

Housing is a fundamental right. No other measures affect the lives of individuals so deeply as those related to housing. And no one knows the interests of residents better or can represent them better than residents themselves.

That's why the City of Vienna has set out to create co-determination opportunities despite the fact that Austria does not have any laws granting tenants the right to co-determination. The City Council unanimously adopted the first tenant co-determination statute in 1988, which gave tenants of Vienna's municipal housing the right to information, monitoring, and co-determination.

The tenants' advisory committee and its significance

Along with residents' meetings, the elected multi-member tenants' advisory committee is the primary co-determination outlet. As active members of a building's community, tenants' representatives serve as spokespeople and liaise with facility management. The tenants' advisory committee performs a variety of tasks: raising issues brought up at the tenants' meetings with the management, enforcing decisions made at tenants' meetings, sharing information with tenants through an activity report, and processing resident requests within two months. The property manager Wiener Wohnen provides support to the tenants' advisory committee by answering requests in an appropriate amount of time, providing forms and notice boards for resident information, and, when possible, providing space in apartment complexes for tenants' advisory committee consultations and meetings.

Tenant support

Tenants' representatives are expected to use their involvement and creativity to encourage a peaceful coexistence, thereby helping eliminate prejudices, and to create a climate of better understanding and tolerance. In order to accomplish all of this, Executive City Councillor Michael Ludwig initiated a further training programme when he took office in 2007. The programme is funded by Wiener Wohnen, and content is designed and organised by wohnpartner. Since 2010, tenants' representatives have also been able to earn a diploma by taking certain required and elective modules. As of 2013, 57 tenants' representatives had earned the diploma.

The diploma confirms that tenants' representatives have studied all of the content that is essential for them to do their job. wohnpartner plans course offerings based on feedback from participants and on the needs and requests of tenants' representatives in order to make the programme as applicable as possible and useful for the representatives' everyday work.

wohnpartner also offers coaching and advising for difficult issues to encourage and support these active residents' commitment to volunteering on behalf of the complex community.

Revising the statute to boost participation

Michael Ludwig, Executive City Councillor for Housing, Housing Construction, and Urban Renewal, tasked wohnpartner in autumn 2011 with the development of proposals for updating the tenant co-determination statute and with coordination with relevant stakeholders. The process began in May 2012 and was headed by a steering group, consisting of departments and institutions with the relevant expertise: the Housing Construction Committee, Wiener Wohnen, wohnpartner, and participation experts.

To enable broad-scale participation, advisory council groups were created in parallel and as a support mechanism for the steering group's decisions. Delegates were named to the groups to discuss the various points of view in detail and to give all residents interested in the topic the chance to contribute their arguments and concerns to the discussion. Four advisory council groups were created: tenants' representatives, diversity groups, wohnpartner, and Wiener Wohnen. The groups participated as representatives of their members or networks and were to continue discussions in their networks and contribute feedback to the larger discussion.

The steering group and advisory council groups took turns discussing relevant issues, which were narrowed down based on broader questions. The steering group and advisory council groups each held four meetings between June and December 2012. The advisory council group for tenants' representatives held additional meetings, where positions on the statute were shared and a draft statute was developed by consensus. wohnpartner published the minutes of all meetings in a newsletter on its website. The results of the process were also presented to tenants' representatives at local networking initiatives, such as district platforms, regular get-togethers, and networking events, and the representatives' positions and ideas were incorporated into the process.

At the end of the process, the advisory council group for tenants' representatives called for a direct discussion with the steering group. The result was a joint proposal for the statute. This step completed the revision process, and the draft is currently making its way through various political levels until the City Council makes a resolution, which is planned for December 2014.

The new statute on tenant co-determination

The fundamental goal of the revision was to make the statute easier to understand and to make decisions more representative by creating an attractive participation option that is available to all resident groups. The revision is geared toward all residents and invites them to become involved in shaping their living environment. When there is a tenants' advisory committee, it communicates regularly with residents through resident's meetings, the central mechanism for making decisions, and through consultations. In order to make the statute less ambiguous and easier to understand, an informational section was added to explain the meaning of co-determina-



© Ioan Gavrilowitsch/WSW

tion and to describe its limits. It also explains the tasks and conduct of residents who serve on the tenants' advisory committee.

The monitoring rights and tasks of the tenants' advisory committee are concentrated in those paragraphs that cover the tasks and role of the tenants' advisory committee. Rights that are already regulated by the Tenancy Act (*Mietrechtsgesetz*, MRG) and are granted to all tenants are no longer described separately. The general focus of the revision is on establishing a strong community within complexes through deliberations and negotiating processes on all items at residents' meetings. The statute also describes co-determination opportunities for residents who only want to participate actively on the tenants' advisory committee for a limited time or for a particular topic. This component is intended to make it more attractive to young people in particular to contribute their interests directly through the tenants' advisory committee. The new statute is a regulation that has been negotiated on a broad basis and will hopefully invite residents to help shape their living environment and have their say.



Ulrike Freigäßner-Hauser,
Professional Development and Quality Management

Heinrich Gindel, tenant's advisory committee Karl-Seitz-Hof, Floridsdorf:



Why did I become a tenants' representative?

"When I was young, everyone talked with each other. Then that changed. That's why we have a tenants' advisory committee. Now tenants speak with each other again.

I became a tenants' representative because I wanted something to keep me busy when I retired and wanted to have contact with people to be able to speak with them and help them. It's always validating when you help someone. It's a wonderful feeling."



Vera Beneda, tenant representative in Vienna's 3rd district:

"The most important part of what I do is finding peaceful solutions to tenants' concerns. The tenants' advisory committee performs a sort of protective function for tenants. It also makes it easier to coordinate with Wiener Wohnen. This volunteer service for tenants is a great achievement and by no means self-evident. Many of the activities we provide are performed by paid employees elsewhere and would cost a lot of money."



Kornelia Schrammel, "Welcome, neighbour!":

"I love welcoming new neighbours. It reinforces the sense of community in the complex."



Franz Pelz, tenants' advisory committee in the 20th district, Denisgasse 54:

"I need a sense of well-being and I don't view the apartment complex as separate from the tenants, so I take care of everything. I grew up at a time when people spoke with each other much more than they do now."



Wilhelm Jamsek, tenants' representative and energy partner at the Weinberggasse complex:

"If you can help someone, then do it! That has always been my professional motivation as well."

Where bookworms meet

BücherKABINE

by Johannes Spitzl

The BücherKABINE is a favourite meeting place for bookworms of all ages. Initiated by wohnpartner in Leberberg in Simmering in June 2011, it has become increasingly popular and is a now fixture in this district at the southeastern edge of Vienna.

The publicly accessible “Kabine”, which was originally a Telekom Austria phone booth, lets people share, donate, and check out books around the clock and has become a favourite neighbourhood communication and meeting spot. The mini-library does a brisk business, and its inventory changes with every visit – it often even contains current bestsellers!

© Portrait Private



Georg Schrems, tenants' representative Simmering

“While I was at a festival at Leberberg, I noticed what looked like a telephone booth, with “BücherKABINE” written on it. Since I’m always curious, I went inside. Books upon books, neatly sorted – for children, young adults, and adults. The BücherKABINE rule is that anyone and everyone can borrow and/or donate books. The idea is to give and take.”

There’s always something going on by the BücherKABINE: book collection drives, cleanup days, children’s book days, and readings by our author-sponsors. All of these events have been a huge success. Famous Austrian authors including Renate Welsh-Rabady, Elfriede Hammerl, Marlene Streeruwitz, and Thomas Brezina have signed on as book sponsors. Mr Brezina donated 500 of his books for children to the BücherKABINE. The faces of many young readers lit up when this gift was presented on children’s book day. The BücherKABINE’s birthday is celebrated in appropriate fashion every year.



© Susanne Meitz/NSW

The BücherKABINE in Leberberg has become a favourite spot for bookworms to gather.

“Reading, reading, reading
... the best medicine.”

Maria Kawelka

“Thank you for this great
little library! I’m a
regular customer.”

Elfriede Maier

“I’m really happy and pleasantly surprised that the BücherKABINE works so well. I have found and read great books.”

Monika Ostler



Birgit Schall, Head of the Leberberg adult education centre

“There was initially some doubt when wohnpartner began the BücherKABINE project three years ago. But it quickly became clear that the mini-library was well received and that people donated, borrowed, and took books. I always see people go in – and see that it is thriving! Once the BücherKABINE was closed, and people came to us with bags full of books. We served as a temporary drop-off spot and stored the books until the BücherKABINE was re-opened. The project likely works so well because there are essentially no barriers to access. I like that the BücherKABINE serves multiple purposes. During the weeks when the district festival was going on, it was filled with texts by Jura Soyfer for people to take. You could even listen to the texts using headphones. Personally, I’ve found a great book for our “fairytales from around the world” project, a really old one. I still have it.”

The neighbourhood’s adult education centre, the nearby bookstore, the Jura-Soyfer Centre, and – most of all – the reading class at Bruno-Kreisisky School led by the incomparable teacher Margot Graf are all important partners of the BücherKABINE who also play an important role in maintaining its inventory.

wohnpartner has worked together with these partners at events for years and appreciates the valuable and creative collaboration and lively exchange. The partners have now become dear friends to the organisation.

Pupils in the reading class regularly arrange books, clean up rubbish and dirt, and make sure that the BücherKABINE is and remains an inviting place for users. wohnpartner is informed immediately if anything is damaged or the booth is especially messy so that it can arrange for cleanup.

The successful wohnpartner project was expanded to two more districts in 2014: Matteortplatz in Ottakring and the Per-Albin-Hansson settlement in Favoriten now have their own BücherKABINE. Both mini-libraries have quickly become popular and are loved just as much as the original.



Johannes Spitzl, wohnpartner team 3_4_11



Barbara Sabitzer, Jura-Soyfer Centre

“Across the street from the bookstore is a mutant from the communications world:

A telephone booth that serves as a public bookshelf. For anonymously leaving and taking printed works of all types that people speaking all languages have, at some time or another, read, or not. At any rate, works that are ready to be shared.

Telephone booths have often played an important role in gangster films. Callers couldn’t be identified. Today, movie villains pointedly throw their mobile phones into the water to escape their pursuers. Or they smash their victim’s phone, making it impossible to be found. Telephone booths were thought of as more durable, at least from a criminal point of view. Definitely designed to be used more than once. When the first telephone booth went into operation at *Südbahnhof* in 1903, it contained a beautifully printed, and tethered, telephone book.

Many people went into the booth just to have a look at the telephone book.

Wasn’t that so?

More than 100 years later, this telephone booth once again contains books, nearly 100, also designed to be used more than once. And when it’s raining, stormy, or snowy outside, you can make a call on your mobile from inside the booth, undisturbed, pick up an unusual book, discover anonymous, handwritten notes in the margins and dedications like ‘Happy birthday, my dear Otto! Love, Leni, 1945’, and get lost for hours.”



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Diverse initiatives and activities

Residents at the centre

by Müesser Seebacher

wohnpartner officially opened the Klub KW residents' activity centre in May 2013. Since that time some 10,000 visitors have enthusiastically taken part in various initiatives and activities: exercise, crafts, group cooking, tutoring, conversation groups, German conversation groups, choir practices, and other group activities, often initiated spontaneously.

The Klub KW project was launched in 2010. wohnpartner provided an unused multi-purpose room as a meeting place for people from different generations and backgrounds for events, meetings, and much more. Since that time, the Association of Viennese Youth Centres has used additional space for extracurricular educational purposes. Specifically, the aim was to create a starting point for resident initiatives so that they can actively help shape “their centre”.

The neighbourhood's residents develop and conduct these initiatives, either partly in cooperation with wohnpartner or entirely on their own.

Klub KW has proven very popular from the beginning. A dance workshop, a book club, and a back exercise class were some of the first activities held at Klub KW.

In 2012, wohnpartner added a gym, library, and kitchen to the residents' activity centre. A number of activities are now held year-round, including:

Residents tutor local schoolchildren in reading, writing, and mathematics, and provide homework support twice a week in the library. In addition to promoting success at school, the focus of the tutoring programme is primarily on the joy of learning and the exchange between young and older residents, which aims to help bridge the gap between generations. Volunteer tutors are trained by Wiener Volkshochschulen in cooperation with wohnpartner before they join the programme. This training also teaches participants the basic idea behind the tutoring programme.



Second-hand shop: One person's junk is another person's treasure. That's why, since 2013, residents of Karl-Wrba-Hof have been able to donate or exchange belongings they no longer use. Anyone can participate and take advantage of the free "shop", which is good for the environment and the wallet. The idea for the initiative came from six residents, who are still running "their" store today. And it's not only material goods that are shared. For many of the neighbourhood's residents, the second-hand shop has long become a weekly social meeting spot, where they can get to know new people, talk with neighbours, and discuss new joint initiatives.

One weekly initiative gives women whose native language is not German the chance to practice and the courage to communicate in the language of their new home. The group is headed by a tenant in the complex, who volunteers her time. Short role plays and practical exercises create an atmosphere that makes it fun to learn German and that encourages neighbourly relationships across language barriers.

Meetings for people with disabilities and their families: This initiative was the idea of a tenant serving as a "healthcare ambassador" for the apartment complex. She invited people with disabilities and their families to Klub KW once a month to share their experience, knowledge, and practical everyday tips. Now the group also invites guest experts, who provide helpful information to the participants.

In addition to hosting regular activities, the Klub KW residents' centre also often serves as a venue for celebrations and festivals, such as:

The annual courtyard family festival organised by active tenants in the apartment complex in cooperation with wohnpartner, the Association of Viennese Youth Centres, and the district administra-

tion. Many of the groups active at Klub KW present their initiatives at the family festival, put on a cultural programme, and provide an extensive buffet.

Vienna and the Ziegelböhm exhibition: As part of its contemporary witness projects, wohnpartner provides not only very personal glimpses into the history of Vienna's districts and municipal housing, but also builds a bridge between younger and older generations to promote better understanding. The *Vienna and the Ziegelböhm* exhibition is dedicated to the Wienerberg district and its residents. The project stemmed from a group created by wohnpartner where former residents shared their life stories. The opening for the week-long exhibition at the Klub KW residents' centre was well attended.

The travelling exhibition will be on display at various institutions in 2015.

The residents' activity centres initiated by wohnpartner aim to establish self-sustaining structures. In other words, residents who are active at Klub KW gradually take over responsibility for the entire process themselves by working together to coordinate community-building initiatives and making decisions about time and space resources. There is now a steady group of residents – the Klub KW action group – which works with the wohnpartner team on site to make centralised decisions for Klub KW.



Müesser Seebacher, wohnpartner team 10

Community garden

Sunflowers for the neighbourhood

by Jan Mayrhofer

In early 2013, two dedicated residents approached wohnpartner with the idea of creating a community garden at the Robert-Uhler-Hof apartment complex.

In the months that followed, portable beds were made available to spark an interest in gardening. People then increasingly began to get excited about the idea of a community garden, and the group of residents who were interested grew and became more diverse.

Participation at many of the meetings overseen by wohnpartner was strong, with plans being discussed and refined, and organisational preparations made.

The tenants' advisory committee and Wiener Wohnen had a positive view of the project from the very beginning, and gardeners soon established their "Sunflower Community Garden" association.

Once the complex community approved the project, construction on the garden began in Spring 2014. The gardeners put their different skills and creativity to use over the course of the year to develop the garden. The result was a 400 square metre garden paradise in the middle of the apartment complex, which is maintained by 24 association members and many interested neighbours.

Highlights during the garden's first year included its grand opening on April 24, 2014, by Michael Ludwig, Executive City Councillor for Housing, and a visit by Karlheinz Hora, District Mayor, during a lively summer festival.

Colourful attraction at Robert-Uhler-Hof

Gardening, working, and planning as a community has brought residents together and created new friendships. The garden is now the centre of many community activities and a vital meeting place.

The community also proudly shows off its garden to numerous interested visitors. The "Tour de Jardin", a bus tour of all of the garden-related activities in Leopoldstadt, gives residents of other municipal housing complexes the chance to see what's possible in municipal housing when a group decides to pursue a common goal.

For the wohnpartner team as well, the creation of a community garden is a shining example of what dedicated tenants can achieve when they work together. For complex longer-term processes to be implemented successfully, participants absolutely must have confidence in each other. The wohnpartner team is delighted that this confidence has been successfully fostered and backed by all participants. Something else that the community garden stands for.



Jan Mayrhofer, wohnpartner team 1_2_8_9_20



Christoph Krepl, wohnpartner team 17_18_19

Hernals community garden

In 2010, wohnpartner, the Hernals district mayoral office, the gartenpolylog association, and Parks and Gardens (Municipal Department 42) began construction on a community garden at Josef-Kaderka-Park. The goal was to foster understanding between generations and intercultural exchange.

Beginning in 2012, 39 beds were given to residents and institutions in Hernals. The dedicated group was full of ideas from the very beginning and formed a supportive garden community.

The group started a garden club in 2013 to take responsibility for continuing the project. Some of the members work on improving communication and interpersonal interactions through large-group mediation with the support of wohnpartner. Until 2014, one-third of the beds were re-assigned annually based on a lottery system, giving each member the chance to care for their bed for three years. This system meant that new gardeners were less committed to community tasks during the first year because they were busy working on their own beds and that third-year gardeners were less active because the upcoming end of their three-year period noticeably discouraged them. Most of the community tasks were therefore left up to the club's board members or were handled by second-year gardeners who were motivated to do community work. Based on this experience and with the approval of the district's mayoral office, beds will be assigned for six years beginning in 2015 to keep gardeners motivated long-term to participate in community activities.

The 1st Viennese municipal housing choir

A choir makes history

by Martin Mikulik and Karin Preisinger

The 1st Viennese municipal housing choir, which was established in 2008, aims to bring together different people through the shared language of music. In just five years, the choir has increased its membership six-fold. It rehearses in three locations: at wohn-partner's premises at the Karl-Wrba-Hof, on Viktor-Kaplan-Straße, and at Kriemhildplatz. The choir members receive voice training from their director, Martin Strommer, and learn about reading music.

Martin Mikulik: When was the 1st Viennese municipal housing choir founded and how did it come about?

Snjezana Calija: The 1st Viennese municipal housing choir was founded in Donaustadt in the 22nd district in 2008. At the time I was not yet working for the Donaustadt office for local urban renewal. The choir was actually my idea, I'm proud to say. Why did I do it? Tenants often come to us when they have problems with their neighbours or for other reasons. I thought it would be nice if they came to us to sing together or if they had something else nice to do. And singing is something that unites nations and generations. That's how the idea came about.

We placed an ad in the district newspaper and posted a few announcements in the stairwells. And that's how we found the first candidates. One of our employees at that time who was a trained social education worker and singer helped us a lot during this start-up phase. But the most important question we had to answer was: Who would direct our choir? All of us were social workers, community workers, or experts in conflict resolution, but we didn't know much about singing or reading music. We were then put in contact with an experienced choir director who even happened to live in Donaustadt, Martin Strommer. I think it is thanks to Martin that the 1st Viennese municipal housing choir is what it is today.

Karin Preisinger: Let's go back to the choir's early days. How many people were in the choir when it started? It has grown constantly. How many members does it have now?

Martin Strommer: I think we had between 15 and 20 members at the first rehearsal. Of these original members, a few left and a few joined thanks to word of mouth. It wasn't long before we had a stable group of 15 to 20 people.

Snjezana Calija: One particular memory from the choir's early days stands out. It was November or late October, at the first or second rehearsal. I was sitting in my office, right across from the room where the choir was practising, and I heard the song "O Christmas Tree" being sung. I just sat there, thinking: "Nana, what were you thinking?" Back then the choir really didn't sound all that good yet. And now when the choir sings at City Hall, for example at the International Advent Singing Festival, and you think that it has only been a few years since that time, it is really impressive what Martin has achieved. The choir now has over 60 members.

Karin Preisinger: You now have multiple locations. How often do you rehearse and where?

Martin Strommer: We usually rehearse once a week, year-round except for a short summer break. We have three locations: the 22nd, 15th, and 10th districts. We also hold joint rehearsals for all three groups before big performances.

Karin Preisinger: You have been making music since you were a child. What instruments do you play? What else do you do besides directing the choir?

Martin Strommer: Like many people, I started with piano, when I was about seven years old. My main instrument is organ – pipe organ – which is also what I studied at university. I also studied church music and instrumental and vocal pedagogy, specialising in choral and ensemble. I also direct four other choirs, so seven choral groups a week.

Karin Preisinger and Martin Mikulik spoke with Snjezana Calija, head of wohnpartner team 22 and initiator of the project, and Martin Strommer, about the choir's success story.



Martin Mikulik: What does it mean to you personally to be choir director of the 1st Viennese municipal housing choir?

Martin Strommer: It means a lot to me because it's a little like my child that I'm grooming – and more or less on my own. Also because it was really terrifying at the beginning, and I didn't know how to approach it. Even though it's what I had studied, you're never really prepared for something like this. When one person

who can't sing especially well joins a choir – those are situations that I'm familiar with. But to have 20 people who don't know what to do, that's a bit of a challenge, I must say. And especially in the 22nd district – all of the members were starting from scratch. In the 10th district, I had two or three people at the beginning who already had experience singing and who I could rely on a little, but there were only beginners in the 22nd.

Karin Preisinger: Do members have to meet certain requirements to join the municipal housing choir?

Martin Strommer: No, there are no requirements. You only need to enjoy singing and not be too bad at it – although there's always the issue of people's assessment of their own abilities – and you should be able to fit in well with the group.

Martin Mikulik: Requests increase year after year, as does the number of performances. What do the members think about that? Are people still interested in joining the choir?

Martin Strommer: Everyone is usually delighted about performances since they want to show their hard work. They get really excited. It's feasible in terms of time since most members are young retirees.

Snjezana Calija: Potential members approach us frequently. We have people asking if they can join every time the choir performs. An interesting general fact, not only in the Viennese municipal housing choir, is that women make up a large majority of the members. Today I jokingly said that we should place an ad: Lots of female choir members in search of lots of men. (laughs) At any rate, we will need a few men's voices for support and for the wide range of pieces we sing. I don't know all that much about music, but I know that we sometimes need basses and baritones so that it sounds like it's supposed to. And Martin has over 90 per cent women in the choir – that sometimes makes it difficult. He sometimes has to re-arrange pieces so that they still sound good. I would love it if we could find a few more men, but we never turn away potential female members either.

There are a thousand reasons why it is good that the 1st Viennese municipal housing choir exists. One is certainly that the choir has become like a family for many members, and they feel comfortable and in good hands.

Martin Strommer: There are all kinds of people in the choir. From the older teacher who recently had to quit because it became too much, to members who said during our last choir excursion that it was the best holiday they had ever had. I was touched – I come from a family that went on holiday twice a year.

Karin Preisinger: So far, all of the choir's performances have been free. But now the number of performances is increasing. Are you thinking about charging for some performances and using the proceeds for a social project, for example? Have you thought about that?

Snjezana Calija: The choir sings at a few benefit concerts. There was one on 7 December at the Votive Church, which benefited the children's ward at Kaiser-Franz-Joseph Hospital. Concerts like these are a way for us to raise money for good causes.

Karin Preisinger: And now to close, a question for you, Martin. What are your plans for the choir? What is your goal? What direction would you like the choir to take?

Martin Strommer: The most important thing for me is community, the human aspect. And it should continue to be the most important. Of course it is also important to me as a musician that people sing well, but I think that what connects people to the choir and the sense of community is a bit more important. The aim is for the community to grow, and when people get along well, they sing well together.

I do have some minor musical goals, but those are things that only I hear. I'm happy when I have managed to make improvements. I'd like to improve small things, but we've demonstrated that we have no reason to shy away from other choirs. We've demonstrated that a few times – especially on our choir trips with 40 other choirs. And our third invitation to the International Advent Singing Festival at City Hall is also validation. It's a wonderful experience for everyone.

Martin Mikulik: Nana, wrapping up, is there anything you'd like to add?

Snjezana Calija: We have a saying in my country: "It's impossible to have an evil thought if you sing."

And that's true! People who have music in them never have an evil thought. And that's why that's my motto. My message for the community is to do good with others. That's what happiness is.

Large-group mediation in Jedlesee

Neighbour to neighbour

by Ebru Kaya

Residents of Jedlesee settlement have worked intensively on improving quality of life in their living environment through the Jedlesee large-group mediation process. Tenants present their concerns and proposals to those responsible at Wiener Wohnen and wohnpartner, and solutions are then worked on together.

Background

Jedlesee complex, which was completed in 1955, has been undergoing a social transformation for a few years. The tenants believe the transformation is connected to the influx of migrant families to the apartment complex that has been happening for roughly the past five years. Most of the new tenants have a Turkish background, come from rural areas, tend to be conservative, and have a limited formal education. Since 2010, conflicts have become more frequent due to:

- Vandalism and politically motivated graffiti
- Use of open space
- Noisy children in apartments and the complex
- Communication difficulties between residents due to language and cultural barriers
- Headscarves in the complex
- Conflicts in groups due to different notions of integration and segregation

wohnpartner interventions before mediation

- Conflict resolution work
- Case conferences
- Community work
- Coaching
- Group meetings
- Activating survey

Process design

The kick-off event for large-group mediation was held on 3 November 2011. wohnpartner presented the project to the residents, the property manager Wiener Wohnen, and the district's mayoral office along with the topics that were identified in the survey as the most urgent. Two groups for the topics were created to work on solutions.

Working groups

Each working group met four times. Identified topics, fleshed-out topics, and discussions of possible solutions then led to the first large-group mediation session. Topics were then worked on in more detail in the groups, after which the second large-group mediation session was held.

Working meetings

At the working meetings, wohnpartner recorded the interests of all participants, and everyone worked toward positive future scenarios. Residents had the chance to express their needs, feelings, and wants. People who bogged down the process were coached and guided by wohnpartner employees outside of the working meetings and then brought back to the group. After three working meetings per group, work on the group's interests then continued at the large-group mediation session. Over the course of the entire process, wohnpartner informed the Jedlesee residents about what was happening and updated them on the progress so that even those who weren't participating directly could be involved.

Large-group mediation

At the first large-group mediation session, wohnpartner narrowed down the topics and divided them among the mediators. Wiener Wohnen was also involved in this process. Initial solutions were developed and discussed. The "fishbowl method" was used to conduct discussions. The large group was made up of three representatives from each group along with the managing director of



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Wiener Wohnen's Floridsdorf customer service office. There was also one rotating seat, which was available to all participants on a temporary basis. This option was very well received. Results were recorded on flipcharts.

Results

Feedback from the residents was very positive. Most residents mentioned a stronger sense of community and a better mutual understanding between those residents who had been there a long time and those who had recently arrived. There were also fewer intercultural conflicts as a result of this rapprochement between the two groups. The effects of large-group mediation sessions also spread to neighbouring apartment complexes, with the result that tenants there have become more active as well. Problems related to noisy children and generational conflicts are no longer brought to wohnpartner. Some of the immigrants now work more actively to maintain neighbourly contacts. One of the other positive effects is that German-speaking residents are working harder to help non-native speakers improve their German skills.

One resident started a German conversation group. Because there was so much interest, wohnpartner teamed up with Interface, a group that promotes integration, to organise German classes near where the residents live. The classes started in autumn 2012 and have been popular ever since.

A few residents organised a breakfast meeting in the courtyard, and Wiener Wohnen provided two picnic tables for the meeting.

The courtyard breakfast has become an institution: the “women’s café”. Women from different backgrounds meet with local women to share breakfast, talk, organise outings, and bake. They invited experts for discussion events for certain topics that were important to them. Many friendships have been made as a result of these get-togethers.

An environmental protection day was held in cooperation with experts from Municipal Department 48. A spring cleaning campaign was also organised at the apartment complex in cooperation with Municipal Department 48 and Christian-Bucher-Gasse school.

The main topic keeping the residents and tenants’ advisory council busy is interactions with young people.

“Something that affects everyone can only be solved by everyone.”

Residents of Jedlese settlement have become more aware of this fact as a result of large-group mediation.



Ebru Kaya, wohnpartner team 21

© Portrait_Jenny Fetz/WSW

Peer mediation

Conflict resolution: young people show how it's done

by Aniko Kaposvari

In peer mediation, children and young people learn how to mediate conflicts. They learn important skills, which they can also put to use where they live. Just like adult mediators, young mediators can also be consulted and involved when needed. wohnpartner aims to firmly establish peer mediation not “only” at school, but also in the neighbourhood since peer mediators can help when conflicts about open space or between generations arise.

Peer mediation expands the range of options for finding positive solutions to conflicts. It is an additional tool that can be used to help change the culture of conflict at municipal housing.

wohnpartner offers peer mediation to schools as well as groups of young municipal housing residents. To be eligible, schools must be located directly within a municipal apartment complex, or most of the school's pupils must live in municipal housing in the surrounding neighbourhood.

First peer mediation project at Siebenhirten primary school

The peer mediation pilot project began in the 2013/2014 school year at Siebenhirten primary school, which is right in the middle of the large “Wiener Flur” municipal housing complex in the 23rd district. Some 3,000 residents from different cultural backgrounds live in the complex, and most of the approximately 700 apartments are managed by Wiener Wohnen.

In the first year, wohnpartner conducted basic peer mediation training in all 3rd and 4th grade classes. A few children were selected from each class to attend five afternoons of training in basic communication skills, mediation, and their role as mediators. The team of trainers and the mediators reflected the diversity of our society in terms of language, origin, etc. Reflecting this diversity is often an important prerequisite for finding a solution – especially in environments with intercultural conflicts – as wohnpartner's experience has shown. A poster at the school's entrance announced that the 25 trained peer mediators are now available for consultation. The peer mediators were able to test their skills in practice a few times by the end of the school year. Each time was a special success for the children, who know that they are role models – not only for other children, but for some adults as well.

“My mom was really proud of me”, says Maria.

“Mine too!”, says Wladimir.

And Sarah's grandma was thrilled.

Such praise reinforces the children's mission to resolve conflicts.

“Conflicts are part of everyday life. We can't start teaching our children how to deal with them early enough”, says Renate Stög-müller, the school's dedicated principal. Peer mediation has also changed the school's climate and organisation. The children are learning to take responsibility and are becoming confident in their own abilities to resolve conflicts in their own way and using their own methods.

Other school projects are already under way

News about the peer mediation programme quickly spread to other schools in Vienna, sparking great interest. Other peer mediation projects are already in progress or in planning.



© Martin Mikulík/W5W

“I’ve already resolved one conflict in class!” says Esmanur, proudly, before her third training session.

Marko: “Mediation is fun. It’s not okay to call people names like dummy, stupid head, or fart face, make faces at each other, pull someone’s hair, or even hit someone! But when it does happen, kids can come to us, and we mediate.”

“You can’t mediate if your friends are involved”, says Sarah. “That wouldn’t be fair.”

“It works like this”, says Vladimir: “I have to ask A what’s wrong. I repeat what he says. That shows that I understood him. Then I ask B what’s wrong. I repeat what he says. Then we try to find a solution together. Once we’ve found one, we make a ‘peace agreement’, in which the kids agree to bury the hatchet.”

A new training programme began at a Floridsdorf school in November 2014. Peer mediators who have already been trained are brought in as experts for the current series of training. Peer mediation training based on the pilot project model from the 23rd district will soon begin in Favoriten.

“Knowing how to constructively handle conflicts is an important precondition for co-existence”, says Ljiljana Kojić, the project’s initiator. “We are all the more delighted that there has been such an interest in the peer mediation programme right from the start.”

Girls as peer mediators

The *Zur guten Nachbarschaft* residents’ activity centre is located at Steinergerasse 36, one of the largest apartment complexes in Liesing. Various groups meet regularly at the centre, including a group of young residents who get together for “girls’ night”.

As is the case everywhere, disputes between children and young people sometimes arise at the complex.

After the topic was discussed at the girls’ night, a group of largely Turkish-speaking girls aged 12 to 16 got together in 2013 because they wanted to work toward improving the conflict resolution culture.

wohnpartner picked up on the idea and organised several evenings with the girls, where they discussed the basics of their own conflict behaviour and taught conflict management skills. The goal was to uncover commonalities as well as differences and to identify the girls’ different perceptions. These aspects were analysed using several questions: How do conflicts start? What escalation patterns

are there? What role does nonverbal communication play? Why is it important to show empathy when mediating conflicts?

Once the training was over, a small celebration was held during the residents’ café get-together. The girls received their diplomas in front of their parents, friends, and neighbours.

The girls still benefit from the skills they learned back then. The young peer mediators have now become trusted representatives at the apartment complex and seek support from wohnpartner when disagreements among their friends or neighbours’ children occur.



Aniko Kaposvari, Project Manager, wohnpartner team 13_23

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Searching for traces in Ottakring

Building bridges between generations

by Dinah Lepuschitz-Stocker

Through its contemporary witness projects like “Searching for traces in Ottakring”, wohnpartner creates space for cross-generational understanding and acts as a central communication hub where participants can connect.

In “Searching for traces in Ottakring”, wohnpartner set out on a journey through time to Vienna’s “Negerdörfel” (“neger” means broke or destitute in the Vienna dialect). Negerdörfel was the name of a barrack settlement built in 1911, which contained 128 apartments for the destitute and homeless. Its purpose was to provide temporary housing to Austrian, Czech, and Italian families, but the “temporary” settlement wasn’t torn down until 1952. Today the site is the location of Franz-Novy-Hof, which is home to wohnpartner location 14_15_16.

“I think it is extremely important that the community spirit that existed in Negerdörfel is perpetuated.”
Paul Vodicka

The project was started in 2012 from a personal acquaintance between a wohnpartner employer and Paul Vodicka, who had grown up in Negerdörfel.

With the support of the Ottakring district mayoral office, an announcement was placed in the *Wiener Bezirksblatt* looking for “eyewitnesses to history”. Nineteen people who had lived in Negerdörfel or had visited relatives of friends there responded to the

ad. In very personal interviews with wohnpartner employees, they told how people stuck together even in difficult times. Influenced by an impressive sense of community, some have kept in contact even after over 80 years, as evidenced by three friends who visited wohnpartner location 16. wohnpartner soon had the idea to write down the stories to preserve them for future generations.

The project was presented to the public at two events at the Neue Mittelschule school on Koppstraße. The presentation of the second book published as part of the wohnpartner library, entitled “Searching for traces in Ottakring – first-hand accounts of Vienna’s history”, was followed by a panel discussion. The Ottakring district museum provided one-of-a-kind photos of Negerdörfel for the book, and interviewees gladly also made their private photo collections available.

The pupils enthusiastically participated on the shared journey through 100 years of living history. The young generation enthusiastically delved into the lives of the contemporary witnesses – they wrote a play based on the biography of one of the interviewees, learned Ottakring folk songs, and wrote about living in Negerdörfel.

By looking back at history, “Searching for traces in Ottakring” contributes to identification with the living environment and encourages a sense of community.



Dinah Lepuschitz-Stocker, team 14_15_16

Connecting the unconnected

Municipal Housing 3.0: T-Systems Media Box at Theodor-Körner-Hof

by Emina Adamovic and Forozan Savari

With the goal of enabling equal access to current information and communication technologies, T-Systems, a subsidiary of Deutsche Telekom, and a handful of partners – including wohnpartner – launched the Municipal Housing 3.0 project at Theodor-Körner-Hof. The project is the first of its kind in Vienna.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, T-Systems launched this unique project in October 2012 – in collaboration with the district of Margareten; wohnpartner; Sankt Onlein, an Austrian social media platform operator; and the 5er Haus youth centre.

The www.koernerhof.at platform and T-Systems Media Box are available to all residents of Körnerhof and the surrounding neighbourhood for free, regardless of age, gender, origin, location, media skills, or any disabilities. “The project aims to overcome digital divisions in society and improve equal opportunity in our information and science society”, says Martin Katzer, Managing Director of T-Systems in Austria.

The primary goals of wohnpartner are encounter and dialogue, participation, strengthening action competence, and improving communication using modern infrastructure. wohnpartner has therefore designed the programme as part of a community work and education process.

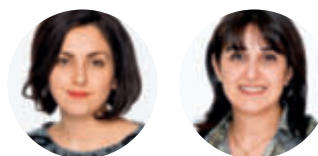
wohnpartner in the project

wohnpartner team 5_6_7_12 launched its two-hour “Open Box”, initially held every two weeks, to ensure the T-Systems Media Box

is used regularly. Two wohnpartner employees are on site during the Open Box hours and provide participants with help when they want it. wohnpartner identified the specific needs of users during these Open Box times and then adapted the units to the users’ interests. The goal and most important concern of the service was to actively approach residents to teach them about new media and how to use communications technology in a way that’s easy to understand.

Once the T-Systems Media Box had been used successfully for a year, wohnpartner launched a second project. Knitting Box is held every other Tuesday from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. For some time now, an active tenant has made her knitting knowledge and skills available at the T-Systems Media Box for children, young people, and anyone who is interested. The communications technology infrastructure of the T-Systems Media Box makes it possible to see new knitting patterns on YouTube, for example. Young experts have been able to show older tenants how to use the computer in exchange for help with crafts. Disadvantaged groups are encouraged as needed, and wohnpartner also accounts for occasional use by specific groups (such as women with migration background, children, and young adults).

The goal is to give everyone who is interested the chance to use the T-Systems Media Box during operating hours.



*Emina Adamovic and Forozan Savari,
wohnpartner team 5_6_7_12*

Unusual methods

Restorative justice – a method road show

by Christa Pelikan

In April 2013, wohnpartner began to cooperate with the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS) as part of ALTERNATIVE, an EU research project. The project addresses conflict resolution in intercultural spheres using the approaches and procedures of restorative justice.

Restorative justice is widely regarded and much used worldwide for dealing with conflicts. It is geared toward active participation on the part of people affected and aims to restore social relationships that have been damaged.

Four case studies incorporated into theoretical work packages make up the core component of the ALTERNATIVE project. While the theoretical work centres around examining the project's main concepts, empirical data is being collected on the social relationships, conflicts, and conflict resolution strategies of residents in municipal housing in Vienna, of Roma and members of a Hungarian minority society in a small town in Hungary, of ethnic groups in Serbia's post-war society, and of religious communities and migrants in Northern Ireland.

In Vienna's municipal housing, this means that this project will further reinforce the focus on the participatory resolution of conflicts among neighbours that already makes up part of wohnpartner's work. The purpose of collaborating with partner organisations (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium; NOVA – Norwegian Social Research Institute, Norway; European Forum for Restorative Justice, Belgium; Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology, Austria; Foresee Research Group, Hungary; Victimology Society, Serbia; University of Ulster, Northern Ireland) is to expand perspectives even further.

Specifically, each of the steps that are required in action research set out to describe and analyse the lives and conflicts of residents of social housing, create a description to serve as an example and qualitative analysis of wohnpartner's conflict resolution work, offer interested residents – and wohnpartner employees – training in the methods of restorative justice for conflict resolution, and conduct research on this training. The goal was also to provide support (including scientific support) to residents as they worked to resolve conflicts.

Finally, the restorative justice procedures, which include family conferences and peace circles in addition to mediation, aim to increase residents' capacity for resolving conflicts and provide them with accompanying and reflective support in their efforts to resolve conflicts on their own.

wohnpartner supports the empirical research in Vienna's municipal housing by enabling access to residents of municipal housing and through its employees' active participation in the research. By participating, it can directly benefit from the experience gained to make advancements in its own conflict resolution and community work.



Christa Pelikan, Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology

Numerous interfaces to scientific fields

Cooperating with scientific, research, and teaching communities

by Jan Mossakowski and Walther Hohenbalken

As a learning organisation, wohnpartner seeks out connections with the latest developments in science and research and aims to keep current.

**The scientific connection:
its importance in wohnpartner's work**

Accordingly, expertise in residential construction, urban development, participation, poverty, and migration research are of interest. As a result, wohnpartner's work overlaps with a number of different scientific fields, primarily social work and sociology, but also history, psychology, education, human geography, and economics.

Participating in the current state of knowledge and research is indeed part of the "third mandate" of social work that Swiss theorist Silvia Staub-Bernasconi called for. According to this mandate, the relevance, overarching objectives, and impact of one's own professional practice should be questioned using scientific methods, and connections to general social developments must be established. In light of this, wohnpartner works to advance its subject-matter work, methods, and processes and examine their applicability. wohnpartner's exchange with scientific, research, and teaching communities is expressed at various levels, for example through its participation in conferences, visiting delegations, teaching partnerships, student internships, and accompanying research.

Experts in the dialogue on theory versus practice

Community workers, conflict resolution experts, social scientists, and other professionals regularly participate in the dialogue by attending conferences and through visiting delegations. Dialogue

opportunities include recurring platforms such as the annual conference on community work held in Strobl and events held by the KriSo critical social work association several times a year as well as one-time networking opportunities such as presenting at the 2012 Finnish-Austrian housing conference and welcoming delegations from Belgium, Germany, France, Israel/Palestine, Russia, and Hungary.

Partners in teaching, learning, and research

wohnpartner gives students in different fields practical insight in various respects. For students who are writing about topics related to wohnpartner's activities in their master's or bachelor's theses, wohnpartner acts as an important gatekeeper for requests for subject-specific expert views, information, and access to a field of research.

Students can also do required internships at wohnpartner, which lets them see what it's like to work in the field for three months under professional supervision. The Social Work department and FH Campus Wien University of Applied Sciences currently offer this type of in-depth collaboration.

The partnership with FH Campus Wien University of Applied Sciences also includes joint lectures and courses. Following a lecture series consisting of six three-hour lectures during the 2013 summer semester, a two-semester course in research and project development was held in 2014/2015. The lecture series examined individual tools used in Vienna's housing policy and current developments in social housing, including the history of social housing in "Red Vienna", tenant protections, gentle urban renewal, administration of municipal housing, tenant co-determination, wohnpartner's activities, the issue of privatisation, social sustainability in social housing, and alternative forms of housing.



wohnpartner was responsible for providing “real world” access and coaching students on field work as part of the lecture on research and project development. Students created surveys to gather empirical research for a group bachelor’s thesis based on topics from wohnpartner’s work at residents’ activity centres. The students surveyed employees, residents, partners, and politicians from different functional levels using social-science methods. In addition to the topics researched, content also included an internal analysis of residents’ activity centres. For example, one working group studied the benefits to different institutions of cooperating with wohnpartner at the residents’ activity centres. A second group researched the factors that determined what motivated residents to participate in activities at the residents’ activity centres – a topic that was suggested by the employees of one of the residents’ centres.

View from the outside, context, and support

Social-science support, evaluations, and analyses are a more in-depth form of scientific cooperation. Research related to these topics is conducted by external scientists and institutes and internally by wohnpartner’s Professional Development and Quality Management.

The accompanying research conducted by the SORA Institute in Vienna in 2011, 2012, and 2013 in select municipal housing complexes is especially worth mentioning. The institute examined residents’ satisfaction with their living environment, their experiences with wohnpartner, their ability to be inspired to get involved with neighbours, cooperation with tenants’ representatives, and the potential to establish self-sustaining structures from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. wohnpartner employees connected the

results of the three-year accompanying research with their practical experience at a workshop series in 2014, where they generated new ideas for how to develop the content further, for example in terms of relationship building with residents and creating processes at municipal housing complexes and for quality-assurance measures such as training, reflections, etc.

Looking toward the future

In addition to expanding internal scientific activities, wohnpartner also aims to step up partnerships with institutions of higher education, for example with the departments at the University of Vienna. A research seminar on multilingualism in municipal housing is in the works with the department of applied linguistics, for example. wohnpartner and the department of sociology are also considering running a research lab together. In addition, collaboration related to evaluation, which has already become part of the sociology curriculum, is to become permanent, and scientific expertise in the research of the sociology of cities, urban development, and living will be pursued.



*Jan Mossakowski and Walther Hohenbalken,
Professional Development and Quality Management*

Afterword

wohnpartner 2020

by Josef Cser

In the past five years, wohnpartner, which was originally made up of nine locally based teams with different organisational cultures, leadership styles, and understandings of their duties, has, thanks to professional guidance, lots of enthusiasm, and a certain tolerance, become an organisation that is unique in its culture, attitude, and understanding of its duties while remaining flexible and able to learn.

As a young organisation, wohnpartner has been responsible for developing new avenues as well as adapting existing methods for specific needs. It always reflects on these accomplishments, and findings are recorded in handbooks or in its catalogue of methods.

wohnpartner also aims to share these lessons learned with others. That's why it publishes at least one book a year on a particular activity, method, or pillar of its activities as part of the "wohnpartner library". So far wohnpartner has published four volumes on various topics, such as volunteering, its contemporary witness project, and conflict resolution. It plans to publish on other topics, and further reference books on its three pillars can also be expected.

From the very beginning, it has been important to wohnpartner to be open to scrutiny from professional circles. In addition to internal analyses and evaluations, which are almost self-evident, wohnpartner also lets the outside world have a look at its inner workings. External evaluations of the special ways that wohnpartner carries out community work activities – focus projects and outreach work – have given the organisation a welcome opportunity to closely examine its view of itself and how it is perceived by others and to verify findings. wohnpartner will therefore continue to cooperate with educational institutions and the scientific and research communities to showcase itself as well as to learn, reflect,

and continue to professionalise. Its goal is also to be perceived increasingly as a teaching organisation, not just as a learning organisation. It will continue to strengthen the lecture and teaching activities it has already begun.

In addition to its undisputed expertise in conflict resolution, wohnpartner has in recent years acquired expertise in community work in particular. Intensive practical experience and the acquisition of specialised knowledge have helped it be perceived as a capable institution, including by its partners. Many institutions and organisations offer support and work in the field of municipal or social housing. wohnpartner is therefore developing its own role, and rightly so, to set it apart from other providers in the direction of the centre of expertise suggested by Christoph Stoik for the peaceful coexistence of different target groups and their interests and needs. Borrowing from case management, that means collaborating closely with other specialised institutions for the good of the city's residents.

The City of Vienna's revised co-determination statute takes effect in 2015. It gives all residents of municipal housing a say in common topics. But what is even more important is that by adopting this statute, the City of Vienna is acknowledging that residents must become involved and take initiative in order to reinforce the sense of community in municipal housing, which has been weakened as a result of social change. While the monitoring function of tenants' representatives previously had priority, the focus is now on the representative function and their role as the voice of the building's community. The tenants' advisory committee is encouraged to represent the different needs and interests of the various target groups in municipal housing to the outside and to negotiate within communities using the professional support provided by wohnpartner. Diversity in municipal housing calls for negotiation so that individuals do not put themselves ahead of the community and so that needs aren't pitted against each other.

Social housing, and in particular municipal housing in Vienna, is home to people who have fewer opportunities to participate than

others because of factors such as their age, income, and education level. wohnpartner deals with demographic and socioeconomic change in municipal and social housing and networks with other organisations to provide constructive support as these changes occur. The City of Vienna is better equipped than many other cities in Europe. Thanks to the large number of apartments in social housing and the social security they provide, people living in municipal housing have better chances to participate and thus a better starting point for personal development than in other cities despite the fact that they are at greater risk of poverty than people living in other forms of housing, with the exception of privately owned rental apartments. Or, as Günther Ogris says: Municipal housing works.

For wohnpartner, this means continuing to acquire knowledge, open the door to research, and enter into partnerships to increase the social equilibrium and participation opportunities of residents of municipal housing, giving them a voice and visibility. Most of all, it means working with people locally, providing support, and never patronising them. It means being the engine of their initiatives and the enabler of their activities.



Josef Cser, Head of wohnpartner

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