

Civil society and institutional practices towards democratization of urban planning: case studies on three German cities

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Abstract

Social and urban movements, citizens' initiatives and their collective reactions co-produce a wide and differentiated space of multiple and even conflictual features, origins and intentions, where local and global issues, from social cohesion and solidarity at neighbourhood scale reclaiming the public space or the implications of economic crisis, are intertwined. Contemporary approaches on spatial planning tend to incorporate new methodological tools to cope with the movements of civil society, a series of procedures and practices usually described as bottom-up, informal or non-institutional, that originate from multiple synergies of distinct trajectories.

Keywords: civil society; democratization of planning; institutional/ participatory planning; German cities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The gradual adjustment of the statutory tools and methods towards the democratization of planning has largely renewed the discourse concerning the role of planning, its practices and effectiveness. The reinvention of 'participation' possesses dominant place as a precondition in that process of planning re-conceptualization. Administration and planning institutions move away from “consensual” or outdated “participatory planning” concepts by earning tools and practices from the experiences of informal collective actions of civil society and incorporating their dynamics in new planning democratic processes.

This paper examines the extent to which this process of democratization is deployed so far, and questions its different aspects and possible limits, utilizing the findings of primary research into relevant case studies in three German cities: (a) the Prinssesinnengarten in Berlin, an example of urban garden that is rooted in the historical “ground” of Kreuzberg neighbourhood and at the same time is interconnected through an experimental networking and educational platform, (b) the neighbourhood of St. Pauli in Hamburg and more particularly the Plan Bude initiative and the reclaiming of Park Fiction, both cases of collective reaction against central and speculative visions for that place, (c) the Platz Project in Hanover, an experimental “DIY” urban development, (d) the Tempelhofer Feld, former Berlin airport where a whole planning process was invented on the basis of cooperation with civil society, and finally, (e) the Strategic planning for Berlin and Hanover (Berlin 2030 & Hannover 2030) [1].

2. THE NEED FOR "DEMOCRATISATION" OF PLANNING

Protests against planning and projects of urban development combined with the increasing rate of development of various kinds of urban movements demonstrate the disappointment of the citizens concerning the degree of their desires' incorporation with the planning and the policies followed and it shapes conditions of questioning the democratic quality of urban planning. More specifically, groups with, -for different reasons- limited access to the decision making process concerning space use, and consequently to their views' promotion, usually react strongly, even violently at times, thus obstructing and quite often delaying the efforts of planning application and actualisation of the “top

down” formal policies while they crucially affect the image, form and identity of the city. Such cases abound in European countries such as Germany (e.g. Stuttgart 21, application of the energy reform, Hamburg Gängeviertel, planning of the reuse of the old airport of Tempelhof in Berlin, etc.), Denmark (protests against the construction of new highways), Belgium (operation of the Zaventem airport), and worldwide, through wider initiatives such as “the right to the city”, occupations of buildings and public spaces of specific orientations, various space- targeted actions of local citizen groups, etc.

Through these actions new forms of appropriation are tested together with the use and management of the space, regardless of the formal or informal planning (e.g. urban culture, claim of the public space and roads, parking days, claim of the coasts, etc.). Such initiatives can be comprehended as an expression of an immediate democracy tradition. Here, citizens essentially demand, typically, effective solutions to the problems through policy, more chances of participation and opinion expression on different political levels. The criticism upon the consensus regarding democracy basically derives from the fact that during the process of making political decisions there can be no immediate influence, leading, consequently, to their not being applicable, and also to making the political decisions being in no accordance with the citizens' interests or benefits. The established democratic legalisation, e.g. through political decisions of elected representatives, does not consequently guarantee that the planning will not be questioned in the long term nor that protests or/and conflicts will be prevented.

The constantly changing perception of democracy has extended consequences on urban planning as urban development is dominated and estimated to keep on being dominated more and more in the future, by the demand for more immediate and extended engagement of the citizens' society. This means that the criticism made on specific works and planning cannot be interpreted, from the very beginning, as directed by special interests but it can be viewed as an expression of a need for increasing democracy in the field of urban development.

A competent framework in the effort of comprehending and managing these phenomena is offered by the spatial governance approach. The term “governance” refers to the appearance of complex interactions, in which “new actors” outside the government and administration on the whole, interact, interrelate and cooperate. In this frame the administration units are mere partners without necessarily having the ability to fully control the system. This is an approach which has been introduced in order to “open” the process of policymaking and to facilitate the vertical and horizontal collaboration among public administration, private sector and citizens [2]. According to the “White Paper on the European Governance” (Commission of the European Communities 2001) “Participation” constitutes a basic principle of the approach. The most significant requirement it poses regarding policy making and their application is the guarantee of wide participation which, in turn, ensures trust in the final outcome. The guarantee of the widest social consensus possible facilitates the immediate and unhampered planning application.

Spatial Governance approaches the space as a “social construction”, created by the engagement of individuals and state holders. Thus, space unit acquires a dimension of “collective structure”, where the related partners have a common vision, to consent in order to cast responsibility roles and to facilitate the achievement of their goals. In this way, an integration of policies and actions aiming at ensuring spatial and social cohesion is achieved [2, 3]. The citizens' sensitisation concerning urban space, starting from every day quality in the neighbourhood scale, has constituted in Germany, for many decades, a significant parameter which substantially affects the policies followed each time. Gradually, there have been developed various possibilities of citizens' participation along with public opinion screening tools, forming action structures/ways of essentially “bottom up” interventions within the frame of spatial planning.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF GERMAN CITIES

3.1 Prinzessinnengärten in Kreuzberg, Berlin

Kreuzberg is the southern part of the widest historical area named Luisenstadt and a significant action field of IBA 1979-1987, and in particular of the section which entitled “*Careful Urban Renewal*” codifies in 1982, twelve principles for urban regeneration. The whole program was characterized by the revaluation of historical urban typologies via the relation among the building and the city and the importance of urban fabric and of public space (street-square). The residents’ claims for the protection of their residences and neighbourhood against previous plans as much as their cooperation with the IBA working group created, in the region, a tradition of social demands, a culture of participation in the urban management’s issues of public space, of housing and of social infrastructure [4].

Within this context of wishes and restoration actions of the identity of the historic district Luisenstadt, it was proposed as a priority to complete the building block in Moritzplatz with the erection of a new building. This plot was occupied by the historic department store Wertheim, from 1913 until its bombardment in 1945, and remained vacant since then, serving parking and storage uses of nearby industrial uses. The plot -now a municipality’s property- was planted by the inhabitants in 1988 in an effort to be assigned to public use - in IBA's framework. All the above combined with limited investment interest in the deprived urban area of Moritzplatz has enabled the creation of the Prinzessinnengärten urban garden and has also provided the necessary time for its growth.

In the summer of 2009, the non-profit organization “Nomadisch Grün” acquired an annual contract for the use of the inactive site in Moritzplatz and set up the *Prinzessinnengärten*, a communal urban garden [5]. While the creation of the garden is due to the personal desire and initiative of its two co-founders, Robert Shaw and Marco Clausen, it is also linked to a wider emerging mobilization of civic groups supporting urban farming projects and cultivating alternative visions for urban life [6]. Such alternative visions incorporate issues concerning nutrition and ecology, solidarity and cooperative economy and ultimately, community creation and cohesion. The creation and operation of the garden is based on the combination of voluntary and paid co-operative participation. The Prinzessinnengärten, along with other initiatives and activists groups, participated in 2014 in preparing a declaration, entitled “The city is our garden”, where a codification of the objectives of urban gardens was attempted. In the same time, it raised issues such as the defense of public space, the social and environmental upgrading of daily life, the legal framework of non-profit urban gardening, the shift of institutional policies beyond the speculative exploitation of urban land towards the social urban resilience [7].

In the case of *Prinzessinnengärten*, besides issues related to the history, dynamics and development of urban gardens as social and environmental laboratories, it is crucial to explore issues related to the experimental and educational character of an urban common in terms of multiplicity as well as the limits of such concepts. One issue concerns the (de-)territorializing of urban social initiatives. This garden, while “rooted” in Kreuzberg’s historical context and linked to its social and cultural tradition, it is in the meanwhile, programmatically detached from the ground, offering a re-approach of hybrid space and its relational character. The garden is essentially mobile/ transportable, which requires interesting experimental cultivation techniques and know-how constantly produced, applied and shared. At the same time, the release from the ground re-conceptualizes “common ground” as a prerequisite for coexistence, cooperation and exchange and ultimately suggests the dominance of social trajectories over spatial materiality.

The second issue is related to the first through the concept of networking. Beyond the practical co-operation on the basis of urban farming, *Prinzessinnengärten* activates the exchange of knowledge,

practices, experiences through networking at local (neighborhood, city) level, social movements and initiatives level, and academic or research level. The Neighborhood Academy (Nachbarschaftsakademie) is an open and widely accessible platform within the park hosting meetings for education, networking and knowledge sharing [8]. Through Neighborhood Academy, the Prinzessinnengärten has joined the pilot project MAZI, which explores the potential of offline digital networks in supporting local collective social actions. The social innovation created by the intersection of multiple trajectories is further enriched by multiplied networking and access to digital information and interaction [9, 10].

3.2 Park Fiction and Plan Bude in St.Pauli, Hamburg

The St Pauli neighbourhood of Hamburg has a long tradition as a place of action and networking for many different communities, citizens' initiatives and city movements. Examples of such social and civic activism include the projects of Park Fiction and Plan Bude.

Park Fiction is an exemplary expression of “the Right to the City” through the claim of a public space by civil society initiatives and collectivities and a characteristic bottom-up implementation of participatory planning. It is a project that began in 1994, as an expression of the residents' disagreement with a large and costly housing and office development that was launched with the cooperation of the municipal authority on this highly prominent site in the harbour area [11]. Instead, however, an open-air green space with sitting areas and sites for several activities was developed through participatory processes as a result of a large and original resistance campaign that organized by a wide and clever network of local communities. This network organized a parallel planning and design process, creating exchange platforms for ideas and desires among people of different cultures, gender, age, profession, religion, etc., and via many different actions - lectures, talks, discussions, film screenings and documentaries, exhibitions. The park was eventually completed and “opened” in 2005, but it is still evolving and has become an important social condenser and a valuable research area on how to activate and network with citizen base on governance issues and also on how to develop and apply participatory planning tools.

The Plan Bude (Planning Shack) project followed-up the actions for direct involvement of the local community in urban planning policies and since October 2014 it has been gathering ideas, analyses and opinions for a large private development –a new building complex in the centre of St.Pauli- in place of a former housing complex in the Spielbudenplatz neighbourhood and on the famous Reeperbahn Avenue. The tenants of the complex were organized under the “Esso-Häuser” initiative (ESSO Houses) and since 2009, when the estate was purchased by a private real estate company, they were fighting to rescue the housing complex from the demolition but also, more widely, the existing social structures. Following a harsh eviction - in December 2013 - and the final demolition of the complex -in December 2014- the protests focused on securing their return to the future building complex, as well as on efforts and actions for their real participation in the planning process.

In two containers, placed next to the construction site, Plan Bude offers a wide range of planning and design tools so that all residents and neighbours can get involved in the planning process of the new proposed building complex. PlanBude is commissioned by the local administration, the District Hamburg-Central but it is also a product of the rich landscape of protest and self-organized right-to-the-city-movements of St. Pauli: In 2010, the so called Esso-Houses were bought by a big investor, the Bayerische Hausbau. Although, Plan Bude was initially commissioned by the local government - the District Hamburg Central- is a result of the rich range of protests and self-organized grassroots movements in St. Pauli. Its origin idea began as an independent initiative of citizens who had envisioned their neighbourhood's development differently in relation to the original official plans of the owners and investors of land and the municipality. Their main slogan was: “*We want to take*

planning in our own hands”. Thus, a multidisciplinary team of six representatives was formed, combining planners, designers, artists, architects, experts in cultural studies, DJs and community workers, who undertook the coordination and management of an innovative and original planning process that required the involvement of the entire local community and allowed complex contributions by everybody. Several discussions and negotiations began with the district mayor and with the department for building and finally the administration and local parliament agreed to collaborate with the neighbours’ planning committee [12].

It was the time and for these reasons that Plan Bude was founded. A participatory planning process began, through the characteristic “container” Plan Bude, based on the principles of independence, expression of everyone’s desires and openness in the local community. The application of innovative methodological tools aimed facilitating contact and understanding of the *site* by the user (e.g. creation of plasticine models or lego-pieces for volume perception) as well as the involvement of several and various people without any limitation on characteristics such as: age, gender, nationality, religion, economic status, etc; the only criterion was their wishes and desires for that neighbourhood [13].



Figure 1. In two containers, located next to the construction site, Plan Bude offers a wide range of planning-tools, to allow all neighbours to get involved with the planning process (Source: Gkoumopoulou G., 12/2015 & 07/2016).

Since August 2014, an extensive material was collected that led to a first edition [14] and to the so-called “St. Pauli Code” which, in practice, is an identification of the complexity of the neighbourhood’s physiognomy. The main view was to incorporate this material encoded in the urban and architectural competition’s announcement, which was co-organised by the municipality, the land owner / investor and Plan Bude [15].

In summer of 2015, the urban design competition for the master plan was completed, which took into account the results of the intensive participatory planning process from August 2014 until February 2015. During 2016 the architectural competition was also completed and the committee chose four architectural offices to present their ideas (July 2016). At this stage, the municipality has now withdrawn and Plan Bude is the only contradictory side that can “push” the land owner / investor. Now, Plan Bude has only a consultative role in the committee and continues its efforts to establish the community that will use the complex [16]. It is encouraging that eventually the desire of both Plan Bude and the inhabitants, for the use of social housing’s forms, prevailed and a large percentage of the old tenants want to return to the new building complex. The research interest in this case study is the growth of citizens' initiatives and grass-roots movements and how they integrate into this evolutionary course of official planning mechanisms and negotiation and its, eventually, transformation.

3.3 The PLATZprojekt

The PLATZprojekt is an experimental urban workshop that began in 2013 in Hannover [17]. It is about creating a structure for the use of a self-organized space that enables young people with original ideas to put them into practice by limiting formal requirements or bureaucratic requirements. The idea was born in the occupation of a private area in order to form a skateboard. Since March 2014, the initiative has been funded by the “Jugend.Stadt.Labor” program after its participation in a competition (funded by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development, FfRBUAaSD). The program is a research effort in order to test ways for involving young people and new models of funding initiatives in bottom-up approaches to urban development. As a result of this project, a number of initiatives have been developed, mainly in abandoned areas and urban gaps, triggering a large number of young people and creating effective networks with local actors and local administrations.

Under the PLATZprojekt of Hannover, a “non-governmental organization” was set up, which rented the abandoned area where the project's initiators had shaped the skateboard as well as neighbouring plots, assuming the overall management of the space. An important reason this workshop could be implemented is the limited demand for real estate in the region and hence the low land values. This land area remained without land use for about 20 years. The funding of 120,000 € over 3 years is expected to cover electricity, water, waste and central heating infrastructure. The basic idea is to provide this space for the development of newly created small businesses and actions with innovative ideas and experimentation. Stakeholders are installed in containers, which they acquire and modify at their own expense. Until June 2015, around 20 such initiatives had been developed while a restaurant / refreshment, playground and communal urban garden functioned. The facilities retain the ability to move, thus ensuring a framework of flexibility and "nomadicity" of the project.

The layout of PLATZprojekt in Hannover was not based on an overall layout but mainly on a draft, which is adapted to the time and space available to it and the first installations were completely spontaneous. By the densification of land use the need for a design has emerged, to ensure the best possible use of available space as well as basic and necessary public spaces and escape routes in an emergency. Towards the same direction is the gradual consolidation with further expansion of the facilities.

Decisions relating to site management are taken in open meetings / discussions. Approximately 100 people are regularly active in the area. Interested parties can be informed every second Saturday of the month about the possibilities under the program. There is no explicit regulation or minimum membership requirements.

It is, however, necessary to involve the participants and to accept their position as equal to that of others, in order to limit possible conflicts in the context of the coexistence of their activities. It is essentially a successful self-managed participatory process, adapted to the needs of each and every event, without any final goal or plan. Although the whole effort is based on the successful dialogue so far, increasing participations is likely to lead to future management problems. In this case, it is envisaged to set up 'unity councils' where the participants who located in close proximity to each other will decide on 'local' issues that do not relate to the whole area.

3.4 Tempelhofer Feld

The matter of re-using the old Berlin airport “Tempelhof”, is an interesting case of civil society intervention that eventually led to the complete redefinition of a municipal administration policy. Tempelhof Airport was built by the company Berliner Flughafen GmbH, in the period 1923-1941. As early as 1940, the airport building was used exclusively by the armaments industry, including the assembly and maintenance of bombers. After the war, the airport played a special role during the period 1948-49 in the operation of the US airfreight. With the construction of Tegel Airport in

1970, the Tempelhof closes for civilian flights to re-operate from 1985 to 2008, when the construction of the new Berlin-Brandenburg International Airport was under way.

The Municipality’s plans for the use of the airport area, include residential use (4,700 apartments at 58 ha), innovation park, library, productive activities, horticultural exhibition, new suburban railway station, pedestrian infrastructure, etc. Several thousands of activists are organized to a Network “Squat Tempelhof” and complain with the argument that the space is not free for public use. At the same time, there was a fear that, alongside its privatization and commercialization, a wider process of refinement will be promoted. The designs temporarily "freeze", and the Tempelhof, after only a few interventions, opens its gates to the public in 2010 as a 355-hectare urban park. The audience embraces the whole project and within the first weekend of its operation, the Tempelhof Park receives about 235,000 visitors!

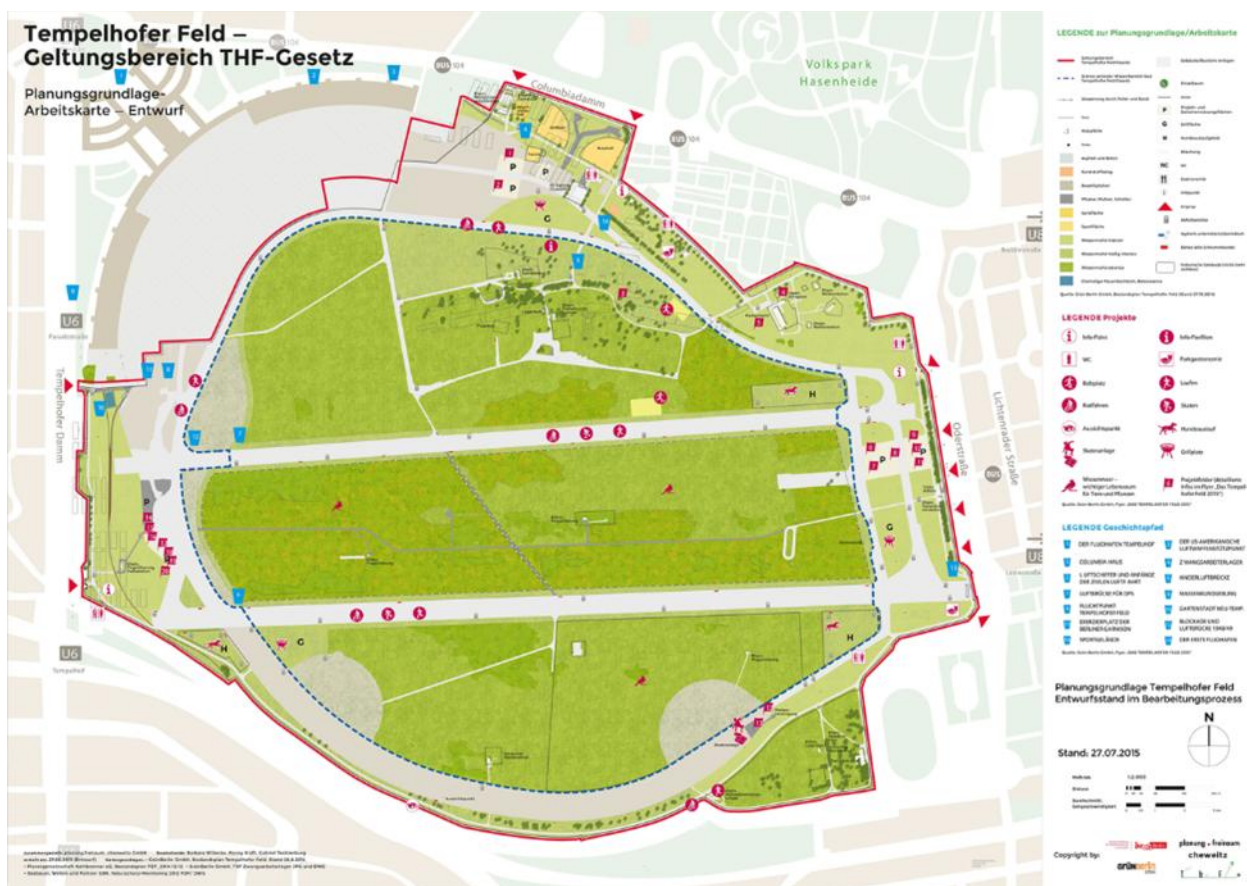


Figure 2. Masterplan for the division of former Tempelhof airport in “hospitality zones” for several free time activities. Πηγή: Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen.

In 2011, a citizens' initiative was set up, which was called “100% Tempelhofer Feld” aiming through a referendum to definitively overturn the municipal administration's plans for land use and preserve the free public character of the space. The referendum is held in May 2014 and, with a clear majority, leads to the suspension of the municipality's plans and then to the adoption of a special law (Tempelhofer Feld Gesetz) which foresees that for the future use and development of the space a new specific plan should be drawn up, with the participation of citizens as well.

For this reason a participatory planning process was organized with the involvement of all stakeholders. It included information reports, conferences, workshops, discussions and open meetings in former airport buildings based on a specific program. Planning has begun on a zero basis and the orientations have emerged from the expressed needs by civil society through a

participatory process based on a "chaotic" open approach. The methodology was formulated by the experts who co-ordinated the project and adapted to the specific situation. A total of 1,000 people were actively involved, while 2,700 were subscriptions to the online platform created for information needs and as a tool for public participation. The result is a plan to separate the space into zones of hosting environmental, sporting, demonstrative and innovative leisure activities according to the needs of the stakeholders so that they can be used by all [18].

3.5 The Strategic planning for Berlin and Hanover.

The cities of Berlin and Hanover in the context of the drafting of "Strategic Plans 2030" (Stadtentwicklungskonzept 2030), have structured a system of "Dialogue" between citizens, politicians and administrators, with the aim of formulating goals and strategies for their future development. This dialogue is based on a set of rules formulated by the administration (LHH 2014, SSU 2014) and includes a variety of information actions and in particular direct and representative participation of citizens, based on a specific organizational chart and a timetable covering the entire planning process. The dialogue in Berlin was organized around the themes of "social cohesion" and "economic development", but also on more specific thematic dialogue on open spaces, housing and climate change. In Hannover the dialogue was structured around thematic areas like: (a) economy, employment, science and the environment; (b) housing, infrastructure and mobility; (c) education and culture; (d) social inclusion and participation; and city. The whole project includes information from the administration through conventional means or via the internet, discussions with the participation of experts, as well as public meetings of dialogue. At the same time, the possibility of online participation is provided, while detailed written documentation is published at all stages.

In the case of Berlin, 4 workshops with around 400 "special" and 5 open meetings with more than 2,000 entries were organized within 18 months of the process. There were also events in schools to encourage young people to participate. The on-line platform (www.berlin.de/2030) counted over 75,000 shows / month and fully served the target of immediate information, but without being particularly effective as a tool to participate. A total of 950 proposals were recorded and evaluated [19].

Grass-roots organizations can also play an important role in the process. For example, in Hannover, the public benefit civic association Bürgerbüro Stadtentwicklung Hannover eV (BBS), which was founded in 1995 to promote a modeling advocacy model, gained substantial political influence. In the "Development Plan 2030" dialogue process, BBS provided information on urban development and participation, through events / discussions, cycling trips and excursions, publications and the internet. It also provides citizen education on participatory processes, promotes dialogue with management, shaping networking and synergies, and supports citizens scientifically and technically, initiatives and collectivities in drafting urban development proposals [20].

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the culture of formal planning in Berlin, through the "neighbourhood management" and "neighbourhood councils", can be detected an effort to turn the neighbourhood and the participation of the citizens in the decision making process into planning tools. This culture, which starts with the "Careful Urban Renewal" of the IBA, also characterises the strategic plan "Berlin 2030". The case of Tempelhof is representative as regards the investigation of the changes in the processes of formal planning with the incorporation of the citizens' participation culture. The planning adopts contemporary mechanisms and practices transforming the social dynamics into a new institutional process that causes confusion as far as the usual questions regarding participation limits are concerned.

In the culture of the collaborative and everyday practices in the neighbourhoods of St. Pauli, the demand on the right for active and determinant participation in the neighbourhood's life along with the wider urban space leads into the creation of spaces that accept but also create "collective desires" with a particular contribution and interest in participatory planning as social and urban activism. In these neighbourhoods, the different forms and qualities that are created "from the bottom" suggest an alternative view of a city; that is now shaping in its urban core a new "city-symbol" (Hafencity) where collective practices cannot be found yet.

In parallel, actions such as the PLATZprojekt, are actually a reason for the activation of the urban voids and the enrichment of a neighbourhood, and of the city, with new experimental initiatives that make the space distinct. At the same time such "bottom up" actions seem to formulate new urban fields of experimentation along with new communities as innovative "dialogue platforms" and collaborative action in the field of urban development.

Through the aforementioned case studies we can comprehend the dynamic of a conscious intervention of the citizens' society in the institutional processes and the central planning through successive and strongly differentiated demands and initiatives. Social action groups, urban groups, citizens' initiatives and the collaborations created constitute a broad and multiple space of various characteristics, backgrounds and intentions upon which local and international issues concerning the consequences of the economic crisis along with the demand for public space and the solidarity on a neighbourhood level cross.

The investigation of the collaborative practices focused mostly on matters of planning democratisation, the role of participation culture, the development of the action groups in the urban space, the new networking potential, the experimental nature, the re-evaluation of the neighbourhood and local networking. Regarding the "prejudices" of the research: participation does not legalise planning, it transforms it. Differentiated (in terms of scale, orientation, content, intention etc) collaborative practices in the urban space highlight the significance of the multiplicity- complexity of the "participation" acquiring a different meaning while at the same time they destabilise the focused target of the planning on the construction and promotion of the urban "identity" [21].

Taking this necessary and existing osmosis for granted combined with the apparent engagement in the urban planning of more and more dynamically formal/typical processes of citizens' participation along with informal practices of "bottom up" forms of space intervention, one can easily observe that administration -and political- mechanisms, examine and investigate in a more systematic way now, their potential and abilities to incorporate the various and different visions of the citizens engaged in the process of planning or urban development or else release in a sense in a beneficial way the dynamic of the citizens society. The processes of governing within the planning framework on a both strategic and urban interventions level can and must become, not only the lab for the designation of participatory culture tools, but also the basis upon which a maturity of the citizens society will take place, and thus become effective and beneficial to everyone.

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