PARTICIPATION AS TOPIC AND METHOD: ANALYSING AND DEVELOPING THE CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION IN HOUSING COOPERATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Housing cooperatives build upon a strong tradition of participation and self-administration. But there are hardly any scientific findings providing insight into participatory structures and processes of housing cooperatives. To a great extent, this fact might be explained by a lack of convenient methodology, amongst other reasons. This gap for his part might account for a missing consciousness and practice in most housing cooperatives to develop and foster a participatory culture effectively and dynamically. In order to bridge this gap, we tried to develop a suitable approach to analyse and evolve participatory structures and processes in housing cooperatives in a systematic and holistic way. Our explorations resulted in an interdisciplinary and interactive approach based on integral theory as well as methods from organisational knowledge and change management presented in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Although housing cooperatives have a strong tradition of participation and self-administration, their organisational structures and processes are often defined and regulated very weakly. A common understanding and groundwork of participation and self-administration is missing in most cases. As a consequence, scattered und tacit expectations cannot be fulfilled and lead to uncertainties and conflicts. Furthermore, housing cooperatives are facing different challenges like new market segments, social change in general and strategic questions of housing development which not only aggravate the problem of participation and self-administration but also require basic negotiations of rights and duties between residents and management.

Only after establishing shared values and reciprocal confidence the individual and collective resources can be used in a common sense and interest. According to different statements of officials from housing cooperatives, we assume that this knowledge gap might be one main reason preventing them from developing and fostering a participatory culture in an effective and dynamic way.

With regard to the question of suitable structures and processes, there are acknowledged theories and experiences, especially in community development (e.g. Lüttringhaus 2000, Wates 2002) and participatory design (Robertson and Simonsen 2012). Therefore, the key question of our study and this paper is not who to involve in what way? The key question is how to analyse and develop the culture of participation in housing cooperatives. The second half of the question is a typical question of organisational knowledge and change management. To answer the first part of the

question, we were looking for a suitable analytical framework, which would allow to analyse participatory practice with regard to individual and collective values, behaviours and resources in a systematic and holistic way. Furthermore, the analytical framework should also help to identify specific measures to develop, increase or optimize the existing participatory practice.

Our explorations resulted in an interdisciplinary and interactive approach based on integral theory as well as methods from organisational knowledge and change management, presented in the following chapters.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

Participatory structures and processes in housing cooperatives are not only the topic of our study. Participatory design was also used as a specific method for data generation and collection.

"At the core of Participatory Design is the direct involvement of people in the co-design of tools, products, environments, businesses, and social institutions. In particular, Participatory Design has developed a diverse collection of principles and practice to encourage and support this direct involvement [scenarios, personas various forms of mock-ups, prototypes and enactment of current and future activities]" (Robertson and Simonsen 2012, p. 3).

In community development as well as in participatory design, all analysis and activities are determined by the needs, expectations and requirements of the stakeholders, in the present study, basically officials and residents of housing cooperatives. While the active and interactive part is quite well developed, a suitable methodology allowing a systematic and holistic analysis of existing participatory practice is less developed in this context.

An alternative analytical framework was found in the literature and theory of organisational knowledge and change management. Wilber's AQAL-Model represents the abstract core of integral theory (Wilber 2000). The figure below shows the four quadrants of Wilber's integral theory: the I (the inside of the individual), the IT (the outside of the individual), the WE (the inside of the collective), and the ITS (the outside of the collective) dimensions of the quadrants.

	interior	exterior
individual	**I – Consciousness** thinking emotions intentions	**IT – Organism** behavior role resources
collective	**WE – Culture** mission values models and stories	**ITS - Social System** hierarchical layering task and reward system communication system

Figure 1: The four integral quadrants applied to organisations (Romhardt 2002)

The quadrants represent four basic ways of looking at organisations: Regarding the consciousness and visible expressions of individuals as well as the culture, and the social system of collective groups or organisations. Romhardt (2002) describes organisations as knowledge communities in the term of the four integral quadrants, see Figure 1.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (2001) developed a similar, but different model of knowledge management. In their SECI-model they show that knowledge exists in different forms and can be developed by the interaction of individuals and groups. They distinguish the following processes:

1. Socialisation (S): Individuals sharing their tacit knowledge by being involved together in joint activities.

2. Externalisation (E): Making tacit knowledge explicit by forms of interactions that allow individuals to articulate their understanding by images, models or words.

3. Combination (C): Conversion of different entities of explicit knowledge into more complex systems of explicit knowledge that can be made available widely in the organisation and beyond.

4. Internalisation (I): Transforming explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge so that the new knowledge becomes part of the organisation's shared mental models and culture and can be made available in the form of documents, manuals, models and stories.

Our study was focussed on the first three processes, with a special interest in analysing participatory expectations and practice and identifying measures for improvements together with the people concerned. We wanted to know, how existing participatory structures and processes meet the needs and requests of officials and residents from an individual and collective perspective and how they integrate individual and collective knowledge and competences of the organisation.

DATA AND METHODS

Interdisciplinary research and development projects have a high significance at the Lucerne University of applied Sciences and Arts and are supported actively. In the project at hand, four different Institutes resp. Competence Centres (Explanation and Services, Communication and Marketing, Regional Economy, Urban and Regional Development) were involved.

Data was generated and collected in two different housing cooperatives in Zurich, in an interactive way, using participatory and intervention methods. The process and results were documented orally (audio-files), visually (photos) and in written (protocol, flipcharts, post-it's). The analytical framework of the integral quadrants introduced in this paper, was used for a systematic and holistic analysis of the data.

DATA GENERATION AND COLLECTION

The case study took place in two different housing cooperatives in Zurich between August and December 2012. The generation and collection of data so far consisted of I) guided interviews with officials from the housing cooperatives, exploring problems and questions related to participation and II) a triangulation of three different participatory and intervention methods:

1. Vote: typology of residents regarding participation
2. World café: discussion at the plenary meeting
3. Focus group: group discussion and validation of the results from step 1 and 2

A survey on resident's needs and requests regarding participatory structures and processes is planned but has not been conducted at the time of paper submission.

Following Wilber's model, the participatory and intervention methods used for data generation and collection can be divided into methods that help to make tacit knowledge accessible by making them explicit (vote, focus group, world café,) and others that aggregate individual knowledge on a collective level (interview, focus group, survey), see Figure 2.
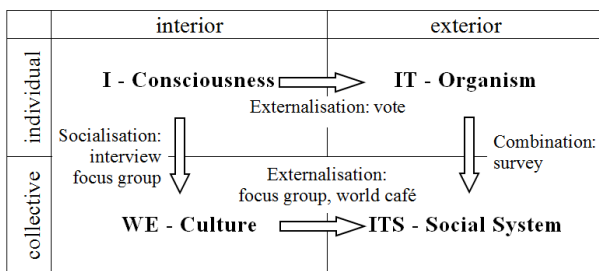
Figure 2: Data generation and collection by participatory and intervention processes.

The combination of participatory data generation and collection with analytical instruments from organisational knowledge and change management leads to a dynamic methodology helping to explore the problems and potentials of participation and self-administration in housing cooperatives (or other organisations based on these principles) in a systematic and holistic way.

EVALUATION OF DATA

Based on the questions and problems mentioned in guided interviews with officials from the housing cooperatives, a first intervention took place during a general assembly of one of the housing cooperatives in Zurich. Participants of the meeting were asked to choose between three types of participation or to define one that describes their preferred type of participation best, see Figure 3. This kind of self-assessment and self-declaration made evident that a surprising majority of participants would call themselves "activists". Preparing the participants for the vote, the category "activist" was introduced as a person who actively presents opinions and inputs for change.

Figure 3: Vote on various types of participation.

Building on these results, the vote was succeeded by a world café-session exploring general experiences and stories with participation in three groups. The process and results were documented orally (audio-files), visually (photos) and in written (protocol, flipcharts, post-it's) and were synthesized subsequently in terms of "ten theses on participation". The results of the vote and the world-café session and especially the theses were discussed and validated a few weeks later within a focus group representing the management and the residents of the housing cooperatives participating in the case study.

RESULTS

PARTICIPATORY PROBLEMS AND DEFICITS

As supposed, the data generated and collected as described above, confirmed a lack of definition of roles and unclear commitments which can be attributed to the individual-interior quadrant (see figure 1). In the individual-exterior quadrant, a dominance of certain individuals and problems with "free-riders" (i.e. people not involving themselves in activities but profiting from these activities) was identified. Referring to the collective-interior quadrant, a lack of shared principles of participation and self-administration was recognized and a growing polarization between management and residents or between old and new residents. Questions of equality and integration of minorities showed to be widely unsolved. Furthermore, a missing transparency in decision making and communication and a missing culture of manners and discussion - amongst residents as well as between management and residents - were revealed. In the collective-exterior quadrant, inefficient and ineffective structures were noticeable. In addition to informal hierarchies and unclear responsibilities missing incentives for participants could be identified as problems in the same quadrant.

PARTICIPATORY POTENTIALS

Analysing the possibilities and capabilities of individuals and collectives, Wilber's quadrants show the following picture. In the individual-interior quadrant, the representatives in the case study featured a strong personal identification with the cooperative housing model and also a strong motivation to take part in cooperative actions. Management and residents seem to

dispose of a variety of professional and methodological competences as well as valuable contacts and networks that could be helpful in future activities. In the collective-interior quadrant, different forms of self-administration were discussed. The pre-condition of cooperative actions are shared values, creating transparency, security, and mutual confidence. In the collective-exterior quadrant, the following issues were raised: more professionalism, more effective structures, individual networks, self-organized working teams and a better integration in the neighbourhood and district.

PARTICIPATORY TRANSFORMATION

Based on the analysis of problems and potentials of existing participatory practice, specific measures helping to improve participatory structures and processes and to develop and foster a participatory culture can be derived. The next step of transformation would consist in the internalisation of knowledge in the sense of Nonaka & Takeuchi (2001) i.e. in the transformation of new resp. explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge of the residents, so that participation become part of the organisation's shared culture. In the collective-exterior quadrant, this could be done by the installation and direct involvement of a regular focus group representing the management and the residents, coached and moderated by an external consultant. According to the understanding of participatory design of Robertson and Simonsen (2012) one main task of this focus group would be the co-design of the participatory frame i.e. the definition of shared values and principles of participation. The propositions of the focus group are discussed in a plenary meeting of the management and the residents in order to agree on a common mode and culture of participation. In addition, the management of the housing cooperative could install a social media platform to stimulate and facilitate the exchange and collaboration of residents.

DISCUSSION

First, we can state that Wilber's integral theory reps. four dimensions constituting an organisation helping to distinguish between different structural and procedural aspects on the interior/exterior and individual/collective dimensions and thus allow to analyse problems, possibilities and capacities of housing cooperatives in a systematic and holistic way in order to identify patterns and key issues of participation. An aggregation of individual knowledge on a collective level can be reached by involving residents in focus groups, interviews or surveys or similar participatory actions, supported by external consultancy and social media which contribute to a constructive dialogue amongst participants. Using the combined matrix (Wilber/Nonaka et al.) allows to define specific action-oriented measures helping to develop and foster a participatory culture in housing cooperatives.

Thus, the paper shows how participatory and intervention methods derived from community development and participatory design and analytical instruments derived from organisational knowledge and change management can be combined and turned into a dynamic methodology helping to explore the problems and potentials of participation and self-administration of organisations like housing cooperatives in a systematic and holistic way. Furthermore, based on the data collection and analysis, the combined matrix allows deriving specific measures helping to improve participatory structures and processes and to develop and foster a participatory culture.

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