

Berlin, Germany

The Socially Integrative City programme is a recognised example of good practice in community-led neighbourhood regeneration. Institutionalised at a national level, it has been in place since 1999, experimenting with integrated participative development in deprived urban areas. The unique and innovative nature of the *Quartiersmanagement* programme lies in that fact that, through a top-down process, the Berlin Senate facilitates a bottom-up participatory process. The experience of the Körnerkiez in Neukölln shows why neighbourhood policies still matter in the discourse about social cohesion in sustainable cities.

Berlin, Germany – Executive summary

The Socially Integrative City is a complex and comprehensive community-led local development scheme that combines a tight spatial focus, local participation, and the integration of policies and human and financial resources. This federal programme, partially financed with ERDF and national funds, decentralises decision-making, by delegating responsibility for small-scale projects to residents living in deprived areas selected by the Berlin Senate. Berlin has refined and extended the original programme's ideas. A distinctive para-institutional structure known as *Quartiersmanagement* (QM) is created in each selected neighbourhood, and manages five types of Neighbourhood Funds, each covering a different type of project and working with the direct involvement of residents. The *Quartiersmanagement* teams provide a platform for networking and interaction, enabling groups and actors to debate and identify local needs, values and responses. One of the anticipated effects of the programme is the empowerment of citizens, through collaboration and cooperation on projects.

The Körnerkiez, located at the centre of the Neukölln district, is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city, which is where Socially Integrative City efforts in Berlin are now concentrated. However, the district of Neukölln is undergoing rapid change. Once an unattractive place, formerly on the East-West border and at the periphery of public discourse, it has recently become an area of new interest for different social groups. Over the years it has welcomed a mainly Turkish community, but now young people from all over Europe are attracted to Neukölln by its affordable rents, and new bars, art galleries and trendy shops are appearing. However, rents are increasing dramatically, and Neukölln is showing signs of gentrification, which raises debates about the future of the district and its low-income inhabitants.

At the micro level, the Körnerkiez is still very much challenged by lack of services and educational facilities and a fragile local economy. The projects implemented and financed within Socially Integrative City have provided educational facilities, new green spaces, family support and encouragement of the local economy. The results show that this approach, which consists of implementing local projects through the energies and the ideas of the residents, proves to be successful in some ways and lacking in others. Particular questions concern the limits and advantages of area-based approaches in reducing urban deprivation city-wide.

Participative neighbourhood management in Berlin

Berlin is a paradox. On one hand, the city has a history of constant economic crisis: for at least the last 20 years it has underperformed other large German cities in terms of GDP, and it has accumulated debts due to failed flagship projects financed after reunification. On the other hand, in terms of liveability it is perceived as highly successful, upholding the tradition of being one of the most appealing examples of social creativity and self-organisation in Europe. Today, Berlin's social creativity has become a 'factory of value' exploited for real estate speculation and city marketing, and is creating further risks of polarisation in some parts of the city. The weakest areas are the ones where levels of unemployment, dependency on social welfare, low school attainment¹ and child poverty are ranked the highest. Neukölln (including the Körnerkiez) and the neighbouring district of Kreuzberg are characterised by a high number of people receiving social benefits (the so-called 'Hartz IV beneficiaries') and this includes children (approximately 50% of the children are dependent on state support).

The aims of the Socially Integrative City (*Soziale Stadt*) programme have thus to be positioned within the debate on inequalities in access to work, integration and education – which are burning issues in some neighbourhoods – and appropriate policies for the development of the whole city. The federal Socially Integrative City programme started in the 90s, when EU urban policies were emerging based on experience of the first URBAN initiatives, and Germany was defining new urban development strategies that could set its cities on a course towards social and economic cohesion. The programme started (in Berlin) with five pilot areas, and aimed at the bottom-up integrative participative regeneration of disadvantaged urban districts. Later phased out to give space to new ones, the programme now covers 34 areas with roughly 400 000 inhabitants selected by the Senate of Berlin.

Socially integrative German cities

In the early days of the Socially Integrative City, the federal and *Land* governments extended urban development support to the 'Districts with Special Development Needs'. The programme in the planning phase responded to a demand for a complement to traditional urban development assistance, and dovetailed it with other policy areas relevant to urban development in a new integrated approach. It was and is still today part of the urban development support offered by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing (BMVBW) and the *Länder*. Financed autonomously with its own federal budget, the programme is based on a range of experiences in various *Länder* and on the preparatory conceptual work of the Working Group of Ministers and Senators of the *Länder* Responsible for Building, Housing and Settlement (ARGEBAU).

The Socially Integrative City (SIC) programme creates a neighbourhood management system by establishing a bottom-up decision-making process that requires the horizontal and vertical coordination of policies from neighbourhood to national level. The main aim is to upgrade and stabilise what are called 'areas with special development needs', and by so doing to prevent social exclusion. The method is to invite a neighbourhood's inhabitants to take part in developing, prioritising and implementing locally-based participative actions. Through the SIC, neighbourhoods and residents become agents fostering the improvement of their own living conditions, creating a prospect of lasting and sustainable development for

¹ 32% of non-German pupils leave secondary school without having passed the final exam, (Senstadt)

target areas. This strengthens self-reliance and commitment, as well as identifying and exploring local resources and potential, and encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue. Over time the overall objective of the programme has moved from improving living conditions to improving opportunities through the promotion of training and education, employment, social and ethnic integration, with less emphasis therefore on physical regeneration.

The Berlin adaptation

In 2001 the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development initiated the 'One Million for the Kiez'² pilot project, in order to directly involve residents as well as local actors. The positive experience of this project laid the groundwork for the introduction of the current local democratic structure of Neighbourhood Councils, which since 2005/06 have become an integral part of the work in all of Berlin's Socially Integrative City areas. The 34 areas concerned suffer from a high level of social pressure and high intensities of public intervention and human and financial resources invested. Since 2005, depending on the nature of the problems, they have been divided into four categories – large-scale, medium, prevention and continuity intervention. The analysis for selecting these areas is based on a detailed Social Urban Development Monitoring system. Since 2007, this system has collected the data at micro geographic scale looking at both static and dynamic indicators. It differentiates between six indicators describing 'social status', which include employment and unemployment benefit, and six others describing 'social dynamics', such as the movement of population and the change in individual status indicators in the previous year. Following the Berlin example, other German cities are adopting this type of monitoring.³ Once the areas are selected and ranked according to the four categories, every project implemented through the Socially Integrative City programme follows the same scheme of public participation and direct involvement of citizens based on the *Quartiersmanagement* approach whereby Neighbourhood Councils manage local resources through five levels of Neighbourhood Funds (*Quartiersfonds*).

The Neuköllner Körnerkiez

The Körnerkiez, selected in 2005 from among the 11 areas of the Neukölln district in the south-west of the city, is an example of an area in the category 'strong intervention'. Although it is contentious to define a neighbourhood when it has no administrative boundaries, in this case the physical boundaries of the Körnerkiez are easy to identify as they comprise two busy roads, the surface metro line and a cemetery.

It is home to about 10 000 people, of whom 40% have a migrant background and one-third is under 25.⁴ Every fifth inhabitant of working age is dependent on social benefits even though they are actively employed. The largest group are Turks, followed by former Yugoslavians, people from the Maghreb countries and more recently Roma. Many inhabitants with German citizenship also have a migrant background such as German families from the former Soviet Union. The proportion of families with many children and a low income is high, especially among the non-German residents. The small proportion of native-speaking German children in the neighbourhood's daycare centres and schools makes learning the German language a challenge. The schools (10 private kindergartens, two primary schools and a *Gymnasium*) in the neighbourhood are facing a shortage of space: before 2005 there

² Literally 'one million for the neighbourhood', *Kiez* being a colloquialism (cf. US '*hood*')

³ http://stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/basisdaten_stadtentwicklung/monitoring/

⁴ QM Körnerkiez, *Integrierte Handlungskonzept 2010*

were no canteens, wrap-around care, playgrounds or sports lessons on the school premises.



Fig. 1. Plan of the Körnerkiez

The social situation is also reflected in the economic state of the retail trade: purchasing power is low, the range of businesses is not very diversified and the vacancy rate is still quite high. Because of the different lifestyles, and due to cultural and inter-generational disparities, there is a huge potential for conflicts among the area's residents. However, the area is a decent place to live as it is well served by public transport, consists largely of well-preserved 19th century buildings and almost no rundown buildings. It has the historical Körnerpark at its heart, with a newly created playground nearby. The neighbourhood also boasts

an active cultural and arts life and hosts the Galerie im Körnerpark, the Kunstraum t27 gallery, the Leuchtturm and the Jewish Theatre. Here, the challenge of the Socially Integrative City is to tackle the pressing socio-economic issues by making the most of local resources, integrating policies and relating them to the development of the district and the whole city.

Formalised co-production

In order to deal with the issues of areas such as the Körnerkiez, the Socially Integrative City adopts the *Quartiersmanagement* (QM) approach, an arrangement that works to activate local residents to engage in the future of their neighbourhood. Its philosophy is to stabilise the living conditions of the inhabitants of deprived urban areas in the face of a downward spiral of marginalisation. A small team to lead the initiative is selected through tenders and contracted by the Senate of Berlin and the district. The interdisciplinary QM team is, as much as possible, an inter-ethnic, gender-balanced group with experience in urban and local development. In this sense, the Körnerkiez team is a perfect example as it includes four members from the local communities professionally trained in public participation and community organising. The QM team provides expertise for the creation of a Neighbourhood Council and Neighbourhood Juries, made up of volunteers, which enable an advanced model for the co-production of projects. Neighbourhood Councils are established through biannual elections open to residents over 16 years old. The Körnerkiez is now on its third Neighbourhood Council since the inception of the system in this area. The meetings of the Neighbourhood Council are often attended by representatives from the district and senate administration to guarantee good communication and to promote the integration of projects at the administrative level. However, some perceive their presence as 'preventing open discussions among the inhabitants', as one resident commented. Institutionalised forms of participation such those used as in the Socially Integrative City programme can turn very technical, as another resident said, 'and it takes good and committed people to make something good, challenging while collaborating with the work of the administrative structures'.

The most important task of the Neighbourhood Councils and Juries is to determine the allocation of *Quartiersfonds* 1, 2 and 3, which finance projects based on residents' needs and proposed by locals. Neighbourhood Council volunteers living and/or working in the areas are considered to be well informed about the social and economic reality of their neighbourhood. Their number and composition varies and meetings take place roughly every two months. The QM team organises meetings of the Neighbourhood Council and keeps the information flowing. 'Sometimes you have to personally call people to remind them of their commitments and make sure that

everybody is updated and well informed about the tasks to be undertaken', one team member says.

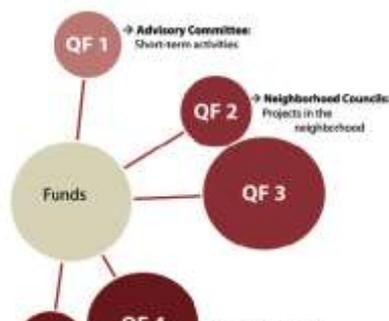


Fig. 2. Neighbourhood funds

Projects are prioritised by a two-thirds majority vote, taking into account whether they address issues of particular importance. The ideas are contributed by residents and then discussed by the Neighbourhood Council. Funding is allocated jointly with the governmental administration and the QM team.

The next step requires the selection of the implementing agency, NGO or group of volunteers.

The agency may be one which is already active in the neighbourhood, or is known for its work on other social projects in the city. The formation of a

partnership is fundamental for project implementation and each is specific to the project. Each project from the smallest to the largest (in terms of money and human resources) has a different arrangement.⁵ The association Coopolis for instance has been involved in the project to develop the local economy. The community centre has been in a partnership to regenerate the central area of the Körnerkiez for playgrounds. Various institutions, voluntary organisations and companies are an essential component in mobilising financial and human resources and developing common activities with the close co-operation of the residents.

How to make projects real

In order to make this process function, the collaborative work at neighbourhood level as in the Körnerkiez is a result of careful planning, support and coordination provided by the QM team. Some inhabitants may already be experienced in taking an active role in community work while others are totally new to it, so setting up activities requires a suitable strategy to reach out to both types of inhabitants. Under the motto *Mit starken Partner im Quartier arbeiten* ('working with strong partners in the neighbourhood') the QM team sets out to build incremental collaboration with people, institutions and associations already active in the area. These stakeholders can work as anchor points for future initiatives in stimulating the participation of local residents, and in reaching out especially people who have so far been difficult or impossible to contact via previous or existing programmes. In the Körnerkiez, for instance, Turkish women have become important mediating figures as they have opened the path to newly arriving families, which in the past have been not easy to reach with targeted programmes.

Moreover, the establishment of a network of committed people is premised on an attitude of willingness to discover and understand the neighbourhood and its people, before launching any kind of project, according to the Körnerkiez QM team. When the team started work in 2005, it dedicated three months to get to know the place it would be working in for the next few years – its members had experience of community organising but had never worked in this part of the town. 'It was fundamental for us first to get acquainted and familiarise ourselves with the people of the neighbourhood,' they say. This listening phase included surveys, expert meetings and simply being there, taking part in the neighbourhood's everyday life and encountering locals.

⁵ The strategy for building up partnership within the framework of the SIC in Berlin is based on the 'neighbourhood cooperation agreement method' (see *Kooperationsvereinbarung Quartiersverfahren* KV QV 2008/09 art. 3) drawn up between the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and the district administration.



Fig. 3. New playground in the Körnerkiez

After the initial phase, the team held a meeting open to all the people in the neighbourhood to present the future work of the Neighbourhood Council. About 200 people attended. Building on this kick-off event, the platforms for public participation in the neighbourhood were built: two months later the first election for the Neighbourhood Council took place and the action jury was established.

The basic ingredients of the Socially Integrative City programme are a consensus-building system based on well-prepared meetings, dynamism and trust of the programme. 'We have to inform everyone through adverts in the local newspaper, the website, brochures and phone calls that we are holding a new meeting. Every detail of the meeting's arrangements has to function. The venue has to be clear, pleasant and appropriate, not always the same, and some food should be on hand,' the team says. The QM team presents itself as the hub of the neighbourhood activities, activating people and ideas. Their constant presence becomes a reference point, a basic requirement for building trust among inhabitants step by step. The Neighbourhood Council premises are easy to reach with the community office situated in the heart of the neighbourhood.

'Some people come to us with ideas, such as students that have just moved into the area,' the team says. 'In other cases we have to encourage people to express their ideas, especially migrants, who tend not to come to our offices. If people come from outside the



Fig. 4. The *Stadtteilmütter* project was financed in several neighbourhoods under Fund no. 5

boundaries of the Socially Integrative City area to propose a project, we have to turn them down as we have to respect the basic rules of an area-based approach. But we are in dialogue with some important stakeholders such as schools and religious centres, which help network our projects within a wider area.'

Generally, the projects implemented by the Neighbourhood Council have been a success in improving social services, facilities and public spaces and in addressing the needs of inhabitants. In the Körnerkiez there have been more than 400 micro-projects including a new design for the square, which lacked public gardens or a playground. Socio-cultural projects have provided a comprehensive educational offer from cradle to adulthood with differentiated intercultural support for skills development, sport and language.

The Berlin interpretation of the Socially Integrative City programme has been aware that these small projects may have spatially limited effects (due to the constraints of the programme's area-based approach), and in response has included fund no. 5. This fund with a larger expenditure ceiling, can cover several areas facing a similar

problem, in order to implement system-wide project structures (e.g. the *Stadtteil-mütter* ('District Mothers') project, which involves basic childcare training for mothers of Turkish origin). The recent *Aktionsräume plus* ('Action Space Plus) project is supporting the enlargement of the benefits of Socially Integrative City projects by combining measures among more neighbourhoods which are near each other.

The gentrification debate

The district of Neukölln and the neighbourhood of the Körnerkiez has changed significantly in the last five to ten years. Today the social structure of the neighbourhood is diversifying much more than in the past. While it is still inhabited mostly by low-income families (some of foreign origin), recently large numbers of young creative graduates have decided to move there to live and work, because of reasonably low rent levels compared to other parts of the city – and the area's 'vibe'. The work of the QM team has adjusted to this phenomenon and, as the Leuchtturm gallery found, 'if previously many projects were financed for purely educational purposes, now, due to the presence of creative people and young artists in the neighbourhood, there is a growing attention to projects dealing with art'. The *New York Times* travel guide recommends the north of Neukölln as new 'place to go' and in February 2012 *Die Zeit* described Neukölln as the area where real estate prices have risen more than any other part of Germany in the last few years. In public debates Neukölln figures as the next area that will be badly affected by the 'rent gap'.⁶

On one hand, there is no evidence that the work of QM team has a direct impact in the real estate market's interest on Neukölln – an opinion shared by the Senate and QM team – as 'gentrification happens where there is potential for it to happen and this is not yet the case in this district'. The benefit of the Socially Integrative City programme is that it 'helps to retain the citizens that are living in and want to stay in the area. This will not be sufficient to make the neighbourhood attractive to new investors or potential families to move here.' Therefore, says the QM team, the activities of the programme should not leverage processes of gentrification. This opinion is shared by Coopolis,⁷ the agency for temporary uses of urban space, which also states that the gentrification argument is overplayed in this part of the city.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the first signs of a 'displacement chain'⁸ are to be observed in Neukölln:⁹ the rents are rising, pushing some inhabitants either to move out towards more affordable rents in nearby areas or to sell their properties. Low-income people are still in the area because rents and the cost of living are still on the threshold of affordability but this could be no longer the case in a few years. Therefore, as an interviewee said, activists and citizens' initiatives are organising information campaigns about the housing situation in the neighbourhood and giving technical support in case of evictions and raising rents.

The Socially Integrative City is also questioned for being in place mainly to compensate for the reduction in investments in social policies at government level.¹⁰

⁶ See Smith N. (1987) 'Gentrification and the rent gap', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Volume 77, Issue 3, pages 462–465, Sept.

⁷ Coopolis operates a project facilitating access of young entrepreneurs to premises in the area by reducing the distance between the potential occupiers and the owners of empty shops in Körnerpark.

⁸ See Slater, T. (2009) *Missing Marcuse: On gentrification and displacement*.

⁹ Wensierski, P. 'Berlin Fears Rise for new Slums', *Der Spiegel* 03/02/2011
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/gentrification-s-victims-berlin-fears-rise-of-new-slums-a-748532.html>

¹⁰ <http://gentrificationblog.wordpress.com/2010/12/18/bundesregierung-spart-sich-die-%E2%80%99Esoziale-stadt%E2%80%99C/>

The neighbourhood projects at local level have in many cases positive educational and social impacts, but the national programme scheme does not allow many fundamental issues of urban inequalities to be addressed, such as the issue of housing costs and access.

Overall, Neighbourhood Councils have a significant role and function in encouraging, managing and financing projects that suit the method of neighbourhood funds. However, as one inhabitant said, 'it is difficult to shift the debate towards issues that are not strictly connected with the mere financing of the projects by the *Quartiersfonds* through voting'. The limits of an area-based approach fostering this type of participatory practice are therefore reaching their limits in addressing social and economic issues.

A unique scheme worth continuing

The Socially Integrative City programme has been a long-lasting policy, owing to consistent political and public support and an uninterrupted flow of funding for different programmes at national level – BIWAQ's 'Education, Economy, Employment in the neighbourhood', LOS (Local Capital for Social Goals), et al. More recently, the programme's political endorsement at national level has been weakening. In 2011 the national budget was cut by 70%, down from €95 million in 2010 to €28.5 million, together with other austerity measures. This has been called a 'killer strategy' for the Socially Integrative City and for the many social and educational projects it finances. According to a recent survey, people fear that the integrated philosophy of the programme will be diluted and that its social aspects will be reduced in favour of major physical regeneration.¹¹

Over the years, the Socially Integrative City programme has contributed to a perception that neighbourhood development was an important feature for the strategic development of the whole city of Berlin. 'Public participation found a ready audience in Berlin among the people in the neighbourhoods but arguably at political level was never taken seriously,' one resident said. 'In fact the SIC programme responded to a city-wide demand for civic engagement.'

Within the common framework, the practices at neighbourhood level in Berlin are still very radical according to the people working and living the area. 'Some neighbourhoods may have a strong tradition of activism and here the QM team is basically networking and creating synergies; in other cases, where there is little history of civic engagement, the animation and activation of citizens became the main task to be performed by the QM team', says Senstadt. The successful experiences are those where the Neighbourhood Management has been able to flexibly adapt its work to the context through listening and taking a step-by-step approach – as in the case of Körnerkiez. Volunteers and QM teams learned over time to deal with people of different origins and with diversities by using different outreach methodologies. Nevertheless, there is low turnout of representatives to the Neighbourhood Council meetings and these tend to be dominated by people who are already very active in the area – mostly educated and mostly native Germans (though in many cases the balance among people's origins is taken strongly into consideration by the QM teams). As an overall result, people consider the Neighbourhood Council structure to be important for social, cultural and educational activities in the neighbourhoods. They feel part of a large network of engaged citizens in the Socially Integrative City and believe that should continue.

However, it is evident that the scheme creates spatially limited effects through rapid but short-term interventions. It cannot resolve the underlying structural issues of

¹¹ Franke T., (2011), *Auswirkungen der Mittelkürzungen im Programm Soziale Stadt*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, p. 25

unemployment, housing and poverty, and it can only help compensate for their negative effects. Community-led development with the feature of community asset management is unique in this format, and although it cannot replace structural measures, it definitely challenges them through innovative forms of participative governance in European cities.

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