

Case study ID

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RATHAUSBLOCK Berlin Kreuzberg

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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RATHAUSBLOCK Berlin Kreuzberg

Case Study at a Glance

The RATHAUSBLOCK model project serves as a compelling example of how public-civic partnerships can effectively address urban development challenges through collaboration between civil society initiatives and public institutions. By prioritizing community engagement and common good objectives, the project empowers local residents to take an active role in shaping their environment. This initiative exemplifies a new participatory planning culture that emphasizes partnership-based decision-making, granting civil society stakeholders equal voting rights alongside public actors. Central to its success is the establishment of a cooperation agreement that institutionalizes the demands of these initiatives, clarifies stakeholder roles, and enables meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The project fosters trust among diverse stakeholders and facilitates the development of a shared vision while promoting collaborative governance.

However, the RATHAUSBLOCK project faces several obstacles that hinder its effectiveness. Engaging with dominant institutions such as the Senate administration of Berlin and involved housing associations presents significant challenges, including resistance from profit-driven entities and navigating complex regulatory environments that may not align with community-oriented goals. Additionally, instances where politicians have bypassed established decision-making processes within the Zukunftsrat (Future Council) undermine the collaborative framework intended to ensure equal representation for all stakeholders. Furthermore, the lengthy timeline for development has led to diminishing commitment from involved individuals and initiatives, compounded by uncertainties regarding future financing due to changes in government priorities.

This report was prepared by the team TU Dortmund University within the UPRUN project. The team of TU Dortmund University is responsible for the content and the accuracy of the statements presented in this report.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☒ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☒ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☐ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☒ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☒ Block scale
- ☒ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☐ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☒ social & cultural resilience
- ☐ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☒ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☐ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☒ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☒ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☒ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☒ Private sector
- ☐ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☒ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☒ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☒ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☒ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☒ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☒ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☐ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☐ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☒ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☒ Empowerment
- ☐ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

The Rathausblock case study examines a public-civic partnership (PCP) urban development initiative in Berlin, Germany. Located at the Dragonerareal in Kreuzberg, the project represents a collaboration between the Berlin state administration and a broad coalition of civil society actors, including neighborhood initiatives, cooperatives, and social organizations. Rather than following conventional market-driven development, the initiative seeks to embed shared governance by involving civic actors in planning, ownership structures, and decision-making processes.

The Rathausblock initiative reflects a commons-oriented approach to urban development. Through participatory planning, new institutional arrangements, and cooperative structures, the project aims to secure affordable housing, social infrastructure, and community-oriented spaces. In this sense, the Dragonerareal redevelopment is often described as a public-commons partnership in which public authorities and civic actors jointly shape and manage urban resources.

For the preparation of this case study, we drew on extensive empirical material. In recent years, the central actors of the Rathausblock Kreuzberg initiative have been the subject of in-depth ethnographic research, providing valuable insights into their perspectives, practices, and experiences throughout the public-civic partnership process. The findings of this research have been documented in dedicated publications (Fariás, Marlow, & Wall, 2024a; Fariás, Wall, & Marlow, 2024b), which served as important sources for this analysis. Although a substantial body of empirical material already exists, including intensive research and earlier engagements with the Rathausblock project (KoopWohl, 2022; Fariás, Marlow, & Wall, 2024a; Fariás, Wall, & Marlow, 2024b), we decided also to conduct our own interviews. Given that the project is still ongoing and has a development history of nearly fourteen years, additional interviews allowed us to capture more recent developments and perspectives from key actors involved in the process.

As part of the case study, we conducted a total of four interviews:

- » **One interview with a local stakeholder** who has been actively involved in the development process on behalf of civil society in various committees and working groups since the inception of the protest movement and the subsequent cooperative and community-oriented model project.
- » **One interview with representatives from ZusammenStelle**, which is tasked with supporting the work of the Netzwerktreffen RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR), a loose alliance of self-organized citizen initiatives. ZusammenStelle was initiated by VTR and receives project funding from the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district. It acts as an intermediary between civil society and the administration.
- » **One interview with a representative from the Urban Planning Department of the District Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg**. The district office acts as a cooperation partner in the RATHAUSBLOCK project. Overall, the district is very supportive of the initiative, as both politicians and planners recognize the added value of cooperative urban development oriented towards the common good. On one hand, the district is responsible for coordinating the overall process, applying for urban development funding to financially support the development efforts,

and establishing the legal planning basis (development plan). On the other hand, it finances the ZusammenStelle and participates as a member of the Zukunftsrat (see below), where decisions regarding the area's development are made on an equal footing.

- » **One interview with a representative of Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH (WBM)**, one of Berlin's state-owned housing construction companies. WBM is responsible for implementing housing construction and certain public facilities on-site and is actively involved in the decision-making body known as Zukunftsrat, representing one of the public actors.

Compendious summary

1. Introduction

The RATHAUSBLOCK, also known as the Dragonerareal, is one of the last sparsely used areas in central Berlin Kreuzberg (see figures 1). It features former 19th-century barracks buildings that have served small businesses for many decades. The listed structures are part of the historic barracks ensemble and include later additions for automotive use developed after the barracks were abandoned in the 1920s. The area houses garages, a petrol station, car repair shops, a well-known live club, artists' studios, a stonemason, an upholstery shop, a drinks wholesaler, an organic supermarket, and various garages for storing tools and materials (see figures 2 and 3).



Figure 1: Location of the RATHAUSBLOCK

Created by the authors (2025)

In 2014, the Federal Real Estate Agency (BIMA), the owner of the site, planned to sell the property for profit-oriented use. In response, a broad-based protest movement emerged within the “Stadt von Unten” alliance, advocating for a model project focused on social and affordable housing, participation, and long-term security for intended uses. This initiative is rooted in urban development oriented towards the common good and emphasizes a “communal and self-managed” approach (Farias et al. 2024a, 22). The protests and ideas for community-oriented use of the area are not surprising given the extremely high level of civic self-organization observed in Berlin Kreuzberg. A paradigmatic protest and DIY culture has thrived here since the squatters' movement of the 1980s. This community, in general, is well-networked and possesses a robust infrastructure (Farias et al. 2024a, 22).

As a result of the protests, the city of Berlin successfully repurchased the site from BIMA with the goal of developing a model project for cooperative and community-oriented urban development. This means that the redesign and redevelopment of the Dragonerareal are now being negotiated collaboratively between the public sector and civil society initiatives. Particular attention is being paid to sensitively treating the existing listed buildings and supporting current businesses. The project aims to integrate municipal and self-managed structures while facilitating residential projects for communal, intergenerational, and inclusive living for rent. Additionally, it seeks to preserve existing businesses on-site and create a place dedicated to learning and history.

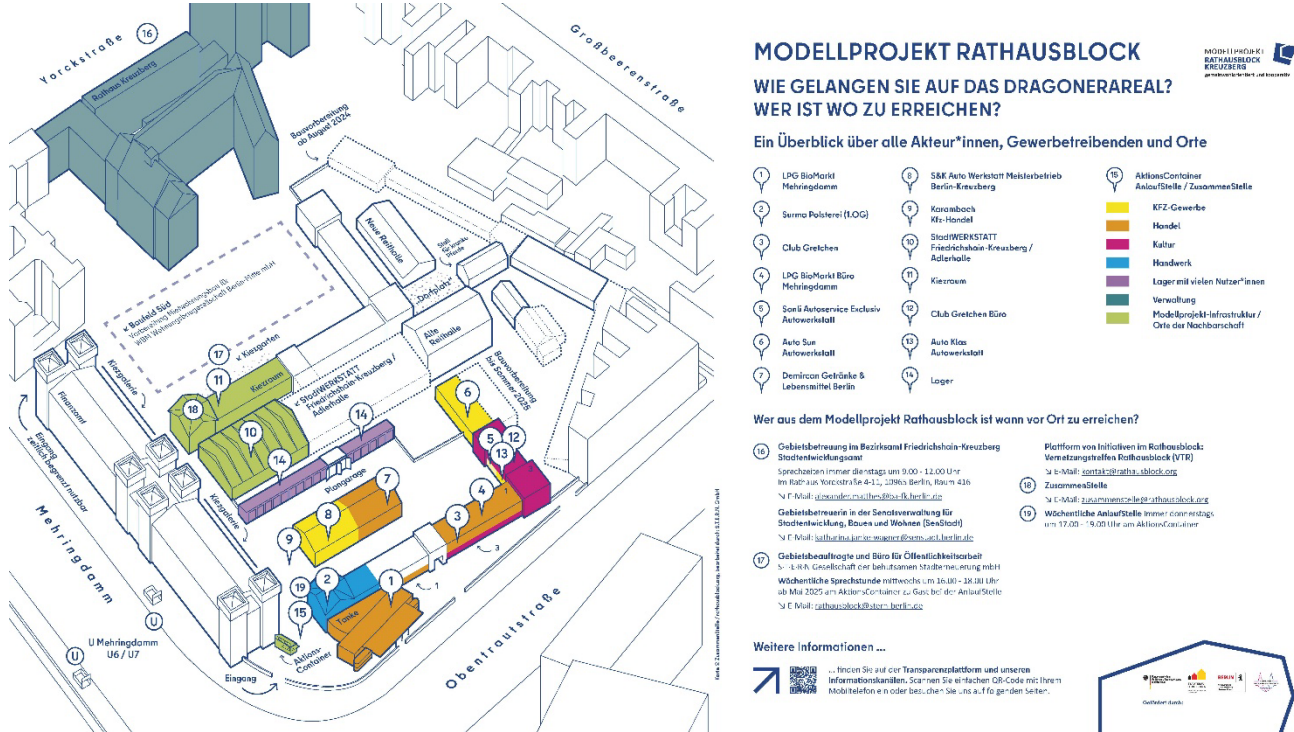
Figure 2: Impressions of the Dragonerareal



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The RATHAUSBLOCK serves as a model project in which initiatives and representatives from the public sector – acting as site owner, planning authority, and developer – negotiate on equal footing (Farias et al. 2024b). Civil society actors are included in decision-making processes as equal stakeholders, holding the same voting shares as representatives of the public sector. This multi-layered process allows citizen initiatives to demand full involvement; they are now actively engaged in the development process via various committees. A key element of this collaboration is the Vernetzungstreffen RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR), a self-organization platform that connects a diverse range of stakeholders on and around RATHAUSBLOCK, pooling their activities for greater impact.

Figure 3: A current overview of all stakeholders, businesses, and locations currently situated on the site (as of 2025)

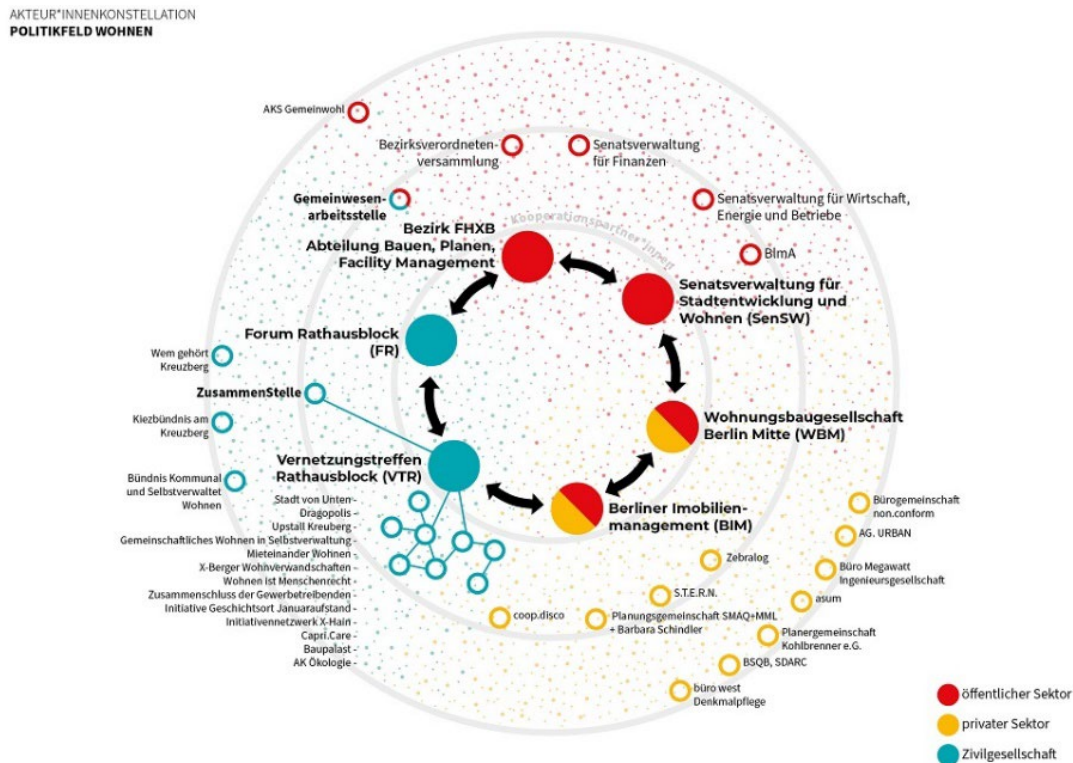


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2. Actors and Collaboration

Given the size of the area (4.9 ha), the engagement of various citizen initiatives, and the relatively active scene in Kreuzberg, it is not surprising that multiple initiatives are involved in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project. These include, for example, the neighborhood initiative Dragopolis, the Baupalast (urban laboratory), Upstall Kreuzberg, Zusammenküche (common and/or open kitchen), and associations promoting communal living. This diversity highlights a unique aspect of the project: rather than a single civil society actor leading the way, numerous committed individuals and various initiatives contribute to its development. Over time, some initiatives have diminished in importance while new ones have emerged. All these actors are interconnected through the Vernetzungstreffen RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR), which serves as a platform for active initiatives within the RATHAUSBLOCK.

Figure 4: Actors and Institutions involved in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project



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The involved public actors in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project include the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, the Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing (SenSW), as well as the municipal companies Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH (BIM) and the Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH (WBM), i.e. one of the municipal housing associations (Farias et al. 2024a and 2024b; see also figure 4):

- » The Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg District Office (Bezirksamt Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, BA) plays a pivotal role in the redevelopment area of RATHAUSBLOCK and supports the development of the Dragonerareal. As central actor in this process, the BA acts as enabling and collaborating partner within the RATHAUSBLOCK initiative. In steering the implementation of the redevelopment procedure, the BA is responsible for several critical tasks. These include coordinating urban planning efforts and overseeing the development plan procedure. Additionally, it prepares and implements measures in public spaces while managing participation processes to ensure alignment with participatory principles. As part of the cooperative and open approach, the administration receives significant support from the current district councilor, who has held this office since 2016. As a politician (from the Green political party) deeply committed to public welfare, the district councilor is particularly interested in issues such as alternative financing options, affordable housing, and related concerns. This engagement exemplifies the intersection between civil society,

politics, and administration, highlighting how collaborative efforts can address pressing urban challenges effectively.

- » The Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing (SenSW) is represented at the management level in the model project, playing a crucial role in determining the fundamental redevelopment goals in consultation with the Bezirksamt. It oversees the redevelopment procedure of RATHAUSBLOCK to ensure compliance with these established goals and adherence to the legal ordinance declaring the area as a redevelopment zone. Additionally, SenSW evaluates whether proposed measures align with Berlin's broader urban development perspective, particularly concerning rapid housing construction and infrastructure adaptation. This evaluation is directly connected to the guiding objectives of the model project.
- » The Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH (BIM) serves as the property manager for the State of Berlin. BIM acts as the trustee owner of the land within the RATHAUSBLOCK, managing it under the Special Fund for Public Welfare (SODA). This role underscores its responsibility in balancing public interests with operational constraints. Additionally, it is tasked with developing a new commercial courtyard at RATHAUSBLOCK. However, BIM maintains a certain distance from collaboration and cites external factors and dependencies that it must adhere to (Farias et al. 2024a, 102-103).
- » The Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH (WBM) is one of the six state-owned housing construction companies in Berlin. WBM is responsible for implementing significant portions of housing construction within the project area. As a public actor organized in the private sector, WBM pursues economic interests while evaluating projects and the aspirations of civil society initiatives from a financial perspective, considering factors such as amortization, profitability, and long-term costs.

3. The RATHAUSBLOCK model project as Public-Civic Partnership: Mechanisms Fostering Civic Engagement

In 2014, the Federal Real Estate Agency (BIMA) announced plans to sell the RATHAUSBLOCK property for profit-driven development, sparking a widespread protest movement. This initiative aimed to preserve existing uses on the site while advocating for community-oriented development that ensures social and affordable housing, as well as long-term security for local enterprises. The coalition formed in response primarily comprises established initiatives opposing increasing privatization in urban development across various districts. The integration of these existing groups with new ones that emerged during the protests is evident in subsequent activities. Together, they focus on community-based development, engaging in planning actions related to the Dragonerareal and political interventions at both the district level (Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg) and city level. A notable neighborhood initiative within this coalition is Dragopolis, which prioritizes the interests of the local community around RATHAUSBLOCK. In 2016, Dragopolis organized the "Erstes Dragonale Festival," showcasing its commitment to coordinating events and community-focused activities. The festival served as a platform to raise awareness, foster engagement, and promote Dragopolis's vision for RATHAUSBLOCK. These

years of active involvement have laid a strong foundation for more structured collaboration among local stakeholders.

Figure 5: Active involvement and participatory formats



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However, when discussing about future specific land uses on the site, it becomes apparent that there are diverse and sometime conflictual interests and needs among stakeholders. The involvement of numerous public stakeholders – such as the senate administration, the planning department of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg or BIM – and various initiatives or individuals from civil society further creates a complex landscape where the shared interest in promoting common good-oriented development risks being overshadowed. Following their success in having the City of Berlin repurchase the Dragonerareal from the federal agency BIMA, the initiatives are eager to take on a more active role in the planning process (see figure 5). This shift reflects a transformation in their identity – from protest organizers to visionary advocates – focusing on promoting development oriented towards the common good while seeking political recognition and meaningful involvement in decision-making. They particularly sought to ensure that future plans prioritized non-profit uses, affordability, and community needs; additionally, they advocated for the self-administration of spaces dedicated to art, culture, social activities, living, and working. The aim of the initiatives was to move beyond traditional participation formats toward genuine partnerships. This involved being engaged from the outset in conceptualizing and planning the sites, thereby influencing building types, uses, and urban design.

In this context, local politicians and the planning department of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg have shown receptiveness to these efforts. Key actors within the planning department believe that cooperation and participation will enhance plans for the RATHAUSBLOCK, making it worthwhile to engage with these

(Farias et al. 2024). This partnership moves beyond traditional forms of consultation towards a model of shared responsibility and was described from representatives of the Vernetzungstreffen RATHAUSBLOCK as a “partnership of equals to jointly achieve a goal that one party cannot accomplish alone” (VTR 2019, 74). The design of the partnership includes various opportunities for civil society actors to engage meaningfully (see figures 4 and 6). Specifically, these opportunities are structured across the following levels of work: The RATHAUSBLOCK Networking Meeting (VTR), the ZusammenStelle (ZS), the ZukunftsForum (ZF) and the Zukunftsrat (ZR).

The RATHAUSBLOCK *Networking Meeting* (VTR) is a loose alliance and self-organized network of initiatives that sends delegates to the working and decision-making bodies within the RATHAUSBLOCK model project. For instance, it elects three representatives to the Zukunftsrat, ensuring direct involvement of organized civil society groups. The VTR is composed of delegates from various self-organized initiatives formed around different aspects of the model project. It meets regularly to agree on common positions and remains open to new groups that align with its goals. Operating on a voluntary basis, the VTR is supported by the ZusammenStelle (see figure 6). The primary aim of the VTR's work is to actively represent the interests and concerns of the initiatives in decision-making processes (Farias et al. 2024a and 2024b; VTR 2019).

The *ZusammenStelle* (ZS) is explicitly tasked with supporting the work of the RATHAUSBLOCK networking meeting. It emphasizes that participation and engagement within civil society should be professionalized to some extent, acknowledging that not everything can be free and voluntary. The ZS thus highlights the importance of structured support in facilitating active involvement. To fulfill this role, the ZS employs up to five staff members, some of whom come from civil society backgrounds. Its primary function is to facilitate cooperation among the heterogeneous initiatives and to institutionalize these efforts to a certain extent. In this capacity, the ZS acts as an intermediary between civil society and the administration (see figure 6). Additionally, the ZS focuses on engaging new individuals and interested parties through its Anlauf-Stelle, which serves as an on-site contact point for information sharing, networking, and registering participation interests. The ZS actively employs diverse formats such as workshops, exhibitions, and joint construction projects to encourage broader involvement (VTR 2019). Since the ZusammenStelle receives project funding from the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district, it faces challenges related to perceived and presumed loyalty. It must not only fulfill its actual task of networking civil society initiatives but also meet the expectations of the district. This situation reveals a conflict stemming from the professionalization of civil society practice: while compensation for civil society work can help address imbalances between the initiatives and administrative actors, it also creates new disparities within civil society itself. For instance, members of the ZS may have more time to gain deeper insights and better oversight than volunteer participants in the networking meeting because of their job at the ZS (Farias et al. 2024a).

The *Forum RATHAUSBLOCK* (ZF) serves as an open assembly within the participation process and acts as a public communication venue connecting politics, administration, initiatives, and inhabitants (see figure 6). As part of the RATHAUSBLOCK model project, the forum provides a platform for the

Zukunftsrat (Future Council) to publicly comment on the project's status and decisions made. It is designed to foster open discussions and allow the broader public to intervene in the process. This format represents a more classical approach to participation. However, it is unique in a sense that delegates are elected from the forum to serve on the highest decision-making body – the Future Council (ZK). These individuals hold a one-year mandate, enabling them to participate in ZK meetings and contribute to decisions regarding the area's development.

The *Zukunftsrat* (ZR) is the highest decision-making body in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project and serves as a key co-governance entity with equal representation from municipal and civil society actors (see figure 6). This structure ensures that civic representatives have a direct voice in the project's decision-making processes. The ZR has both decision-making and recommendation functions, linking broader public input to the core decision-making body. It comprises statutory and elected members from various institutions and interest groups, all possessing decision-making rights. The distribution of voting shares within the *Zukunftsrat* is as follows:

- » Six institutional representatives: Two representatives from the Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen (SenSW), two representatives from the Bezirksamt Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (BA), one representative from BIM Berliner Immobilienmanagement GmbH, and one representative from WBM Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH.
- » Six representatives from initiatives or civil society: Three representatives from the Vernetzungstreffen RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR), two representatives elected from the Forum RATHAUSBLOCK, and one representative of local businesses.

Furthermore, *working groups* were essential for the integrative and participative approach in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project. These open, thematic discussion and working formats are generally public and convene as needed (e.g., working groups focused on housing and social affairs, urban spaces and infrastructures, planning and building regulations, etc.). This collaborative approach emphasized integrating professional expertise with local knowledge and needs articulated within the working groups and other cooperative structures. As a result, the working groups acted as a catalyst for shifting from passive participation to active cooperation. They empowered community members to shape the RATHAUSBLOCK project through shared learning and direct involvement.

In summary, the Public-Civic Partnership represents a strategic alliance that transcends traditional cooperative urban development. Rooted in civil society initiatives, it addresses broader urban concerns while redefining civil society from a collection of neighborhoods with individual interests to a self-empowered, highly networked urban community engaged in political advocacy. Within this partnership, initiatives act as strategic partners in urban development, embodying self-managed and communal principles. They aim to integrate grassroots self-organization with active participation in existing political and administrative structures, seeking to create new forms of common property or commons. This collaborative spirit is spatially expressed in the RATHAUSBLOCK. "*Gretchen*" has served as a venue for neighborhood assemblies since 2016, fostering active community involvement. Meanwhile,

the "*Plangarage*" functions as the hub for ZusammenStelle's activities, serving as a vital connection point for the project. Initiatives associated with the Vernetzungstreffen RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR) have also utilized accessible public spaces within the *Kiez* for their regular meetings. The selection of these venues facilitates collaboration and coordination among various civil society groups, providing appropriate settings for dialogue and collective decision-making. Overall, this partnership exemplifies a successful experiment in self-management and communal values, demonstrating partnership-based development at eye level while promoting the institutional integration of civil society actors.

4. Findings: Achievements and obstacles of the Public-Civic-Partnership

The RATHAUSBLOCK project has made significant strides in both processes and outcomes, showcasing a transformative approach to urban development through its public-civic partnership model:

- » **Cooperation Agreement:** The signing of the cooperation agreement marked a critical turning point, institutionalizing civil society demands for an equal partnership. This agreement provided a framework for initiatives to participate in decision-making and clarified stakeholder positions, enabling collaboration towards common good objectives. It was essential for moving beyond traditional forms of civic participation and formalizing a cooperative approach to urban development.
- » **Trust and Joint Vision:** The interactions among numerous stakeholders have fostered trust and facilitated the development of a shared vision. The initiatives established structures such as the Networking Meeting RATHAUSBLOCK (VTR), which has been pivotal in driving the project forward.
- » **Participatory Planning Culture:** The RATHAUSBLOCK project exemplifies a new participatory planning culture characterized by ongoing experimentation with partnership-based decision-making. This shift emphasizes cooperation over mere participation or consultation, promoting collective learning and innovation.
- » **Transformative Social Innovation:** The project serves as a prime example of transformative social innovation, explicitly challenging dominant market logics and traditional ownership models while focusing on building transformative capacity through collective learning and intentional processes. Its public-civic-partnership structure supports distributed leadership, collaborative governance and decision-making frameworks while challenging and redefining value systems within urban development.

While the RATHAUSBLOCK model project has demonstrated significant achievements in transforming urban development practices through civic engagement, several challenges and limitations have emerged that hinder its effectiveness. First of all, the ZR (the Future Council) faces constraints when implementing the shared vision for the area. There is dissatisfaction among initiatives regarding the perceived lack of equal coordination and cooperation, particularly as public actors sometimes undermine these efforts. A notable example occurred with the decision regarding the location of a youth recreation center, where politicians bypassed the ZR's established decision-making structure (in this case there was

no consensus on the location of the youth recreation center in the ZR, but politicians prioritized and voted for a location). This disregard for the cooperation agreement raises questions about its value and undermines trust among stakeholders.

The transfer of land to WBM (Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin-Mitte mbH) has faced criticism from initiatives that advocate for a model without ‘exclusive’ ownership, expressing concerns about potential exclusion from decision-making processes and feeling sidelined in agreements made without civil society input. This situation highlights the differing logics of action among stakeholders such as BIM and WBM. Their integration into civic engagement mechanisms can create tensions between adherence to external regulations, financial constraints, and business imperatives versus the common good-oriented goals championed by civil society initiatives.

In the opinion of the public stakeholders (and current landowners), many decisions in the ongoing implementation phase require expert knowledge that may not align with broad social consensus or community input – such as planning combined sewer systems or assessing infrastructure costs – resulting in further disconnects between stakeholders. As WBM takes on responsibility for housing construction, there is a tendency to prioritize programming and management over cooperative decision-making regarding construction measures. This shift can limit collaborative opportunities within the project framework. It is important to recognize that WBM bears significant economic risk in developing and renting approximately 80% of the apartments in the district, which includes providing non-profit uses like public spaces and common facilities. Consequently, the focus remains on programming and management of utilization ideas rather than fostering cooperative engagement in the realization of construction and development measures.

Furthermore, the lengthy timeline for development—characterized by delays in adopting development plans and starting construction—has led to diminishing commitment from involved individuals and initiatives. Future financing for cooperative efforts also remains uncertain, particularly due to the new government in Berlin and related shifts in priorities. This uncertainty raises questions about the continuation of the model project, as there is a notable lack of financial resources and political will, which significantly dampens the motivation and enthusiasm of active stakeholders, especially among initiatives and the planning office of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg.

This situation is also reflected in discussions about future ideas for strategic partnerships. Civil society advocates have proposed a revolving fund financed by income from BBM or BIM; however, concerns about its implementation feasibility arise due to financial and political uncertainties. Ideally, this fund would support affordable spaces for common good purposes while facilitating participation and concrete cooperation. Yet, its viability remains questionable within the current partnership structure. Additionally, it is unclear how or if the Zukunftsrat (Future Council) could be transformed into a Neighborhood Council that operates collaboratively with tenant representatives, trade representatives, and local community workers to enhance neighborhood management effectively. It can be concluded that, while the RATHAUSBLOCK project presents significant promise for innovative urban development through

civic engagement, it is essential to address the existing challenges. Doing so is crucial for sustaining momentum and achieving long-term success in establishing meaningful partnerships that prioritize community needs.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The RATHAUSBLOCK model project exemplifies a successful public-civic partnership, showcasing how collaboration between citizens' initiatives and public institutions can effectively tackle urban development challenges. By emphasizing community engagement and common good objectives, the project highlights innovative practices that prioritize the needs and aspirations of local residents. Public-civic partnerships, in general, facilitate meaningful engagement by allowing diverse stakeholders to contribute their insights and expertise in shaping shared community goals. The benefits are extensive: they foster trust, enhance civic participation, promote transparency, and ensure that development initiatives align with community needs rather than solely economic interests. For these partnerships to thrive, several key elements are essential.

- » **Innovative Participatory Planning Culture:** The RATHAUSBLOCK project exemplifies a new participatory planning culture characterized by partnership-based decision-making. The willingness and readiness of political and administrative actors to not only involve civil society stakeholders but also actively include them in decision-making processes—granting them equal voting rights—are key components of this approach.
- » **Importance of Cooperative Agreements:** Establishing a cooperation agreement is crucial for institutionalizing civil society demands and clarifying stakeholder roles within the RATHAUSBLOCK model project. This framework facilitates effective participation in decision-making and fosters collaboration towards common good objectives.
- » **Need for Stable Institutions:** Creating stable institutions and adhering to agreed-upon rules is essential for sustaining engagement. Although the cooperation agreement in the RATHAUSBLOCK model project is not legally binding, it serves as the foundation for public-civic partnerships and fosters trustful collaboration among stakeholders.
- » **Navigating Institutional Challenges:** Engaging with dominant institutions can pose significant challenges, such as resistance from state-owned companies motivated by profit. Understanding these dynamics is vital for effectively navigating complex urban planning environments. Building trust through structured interactions and adherence to agreements helps develop a shared vision that drives the project forward, underscoring the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

To conclude, it seems that establishing clear cooperation agreements is vital for defining roles and responsibilities among stakeholders. Creating structured opportunities for dialogue and negotiation helps navigate differing perspectives and cultivates a collaborative culture. Additionally, ongoing support from political leaders who value co-productive solutions significantly enhances the effectiveness of these partnerships. While this is the case at the district level, support for the model project has declined

significantly at the city level in Berlin due to changes in the governing coalition in 2023; the Senate has practically discontinued its support for the model project.

Ultimately, successful public-civic partnerships require a commitment to continuous learning, adaptability, and reflection on experiences. By prioritizing community engagement and common good objectives, these partnerships have the potential to drive innovative urban development that genuinely reflects the aspirations of the communities they serve.

Furthermore, the (public) funding of the RATHAUSBLOCK model project plays a crucial role in its implementation and overall success. Financial support enables the necessary resources for planning, development, and community engagement activities, which are essential for fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Without adequate funding, many initiatives may struggle to sustain momentum, engage participants effectively, or implement their vision for the area. Moreover, funding can enhance the credibility of the project and attract further investment from other sources, creating a positive feedback loop that supports ongoing efforts. It also allows for the establishment of dedicated staff and resources needed to coordinate activities, facilitate communication, and provide technical expertise. In summary, while community initiative and civic engagement are vital components of the RATHAUSBLOCK project, funding is essential for translating these efforts into tangible outcomes. The project's success underscores the importance of securing financial resources to support collaborative urban development initiatives effectively.

Attachments

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