

STADTMENSCH ALTENBURG

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

Authors

Negin Amiri
Frank Othengrafen

Name of the institution

TU Dortmund University

Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code

August-Schmidt-Str. 10
44227 Dortmund, Germany

STADTMENSCH IN ALTENBURG

Case Study at a Glance

The STADTMENSCH initiative, translating to "city person," is a grassroots movement based in Altenburg, Germany, aimed at empowering residents to actively participate in urban development. Established against the backdrop of significant population decline and dissatisfaction with local conditions, STADTMENSCH seeks to foster a sense of community ownership and responsibility. The initiative emerged from local discontent in 2016, encouraging innovative ideas and spatial impulses to enhance living conditions. A key milestone for STADTMENSCH was the 2018 festival, which served as a platform for civic engagement and networking among various initiatives. This event successfully unified previously fragmented civil society efforts, promoting collaboration toward common goals. Following the festival's success, the initiative applied for national funding under "Shaping the City Together! New Models of Neighborhood Development," securing approximately €700,000 to support its activities.

STADTMENSCH emphasizes creativity and local pride while reframing perceptions of shrinkage as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks. By fostering collective self-efficacy among residents, the initiative aims to empower citizens for self-determination while addressing out-migration concerns and providing prospects for younger populations. Through programs like „#Do-it-Yourself“, “Ringing at a Stranger’s Door” and “100 Days, 100 Actions,” STADTMENSCH encourages wide participation by offering financial support for community-driven projects that enhance public spaces. The decentralized structure allows individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage according to their interests and capacities. However, challenges remain regarding proactive collaboration with municipal authorities; instances where decision-making processes were bypassed highlight the need for clearer roles within this partnership framework. Ultimately, STADTMENSCH illustrates how civic engagement can drive urban transformation by harnessing local strengths and fostering inclusive participation in shaping public spaces. The initiative serves as an example of how communities can come together to address shared challenges while promoting social resilience through active involvement in urban development processes.

This report was prepared by the team of 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.

Unless otherwise indicated, the rights to all images, figures, and photographs included in this report belong to the authors or the team of TU Dortmund University. Any third-party materials are used with appropriate permission or attribution where required.

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

STADTMENSCH Altenburg was an innovative project that was financially supported by the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development, and Building from 2019 to 2021 as part of the national urban development policy (“Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik”). As one of the selected model projects nationwide, it received special attention and was scientifically evaluated. This evaluation allowed for a deeper analysis of the project's effectiveness and outcomes.

For the preparation of this case study, we drew on extensive empirical material. The central "makers" and actors of STADTMENSCH Altenburg have been interviewed multiple times in both regional and national newspapers, providing valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences. Additionally, they have processed their findings in a dedicated publication (Fehre & Seifert 2022), which served as an important source of information. Furthermore, interviews with key actors were conducted as part of other recent and similar research projects (e.g., Bochinski et al. 2022 and 2023). These interviews broadened our understanding of the dynamics within the project and the roles of those involved.

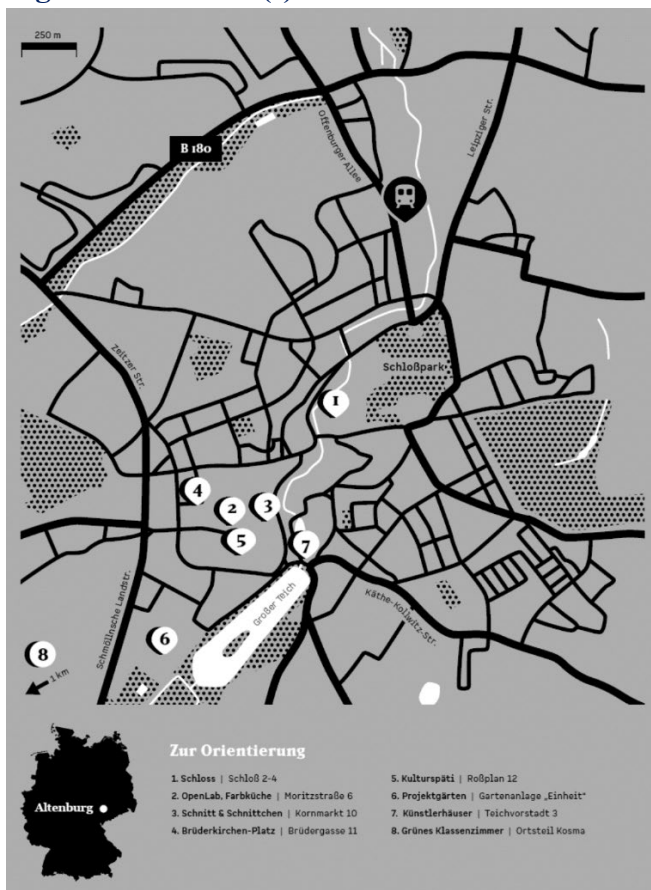
Due to the available empirical material, along with intensive research and previous engagements with STADTMENSCH Altenburg (Reinecke et al. 2024), we decided not to conduct our own interviews. Instead, we analyzed existing materials and reports. This also includes evaluating images and video materials in which key actors as well as actions and activities of the initiative are presented (e.g., Bernhard 2023 and 2024). Through this comprehensive evaluation, we were able to create a well-founded picture of STADTMENSCH Altenburg that highlights both the challenges and successes of the project, thus making a valuable contribution to the scientific discussion about citizen engagement in urban development processes.

Compendious summary

1. Introduction

"STADTMENSCH," translating to "city person," is an initiative based in Altenburg, a medium-sized town in East Germany located in Thuringia, approximately 40 kilometers south of Leipzig and northeast of Chemnitz (see figure 1). Historically a residential area with cultural facilities such as a theater, castle, and a historic old town center, Altenburg was once an economically productive industrial town during the GDR era. However, following reunification, many companies closed, leading to significant population decline (Bernhard 2023 and 2024; Bochinski et al. 2023). Over the past 25 years, Altenburg's population has nearly halved to around 31,000 residents, with ongoing negative trends (Bernhard 2023). The unemployment rate stands at a comparatively high 7.6 percent (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2022), and there has been an increasing number of vacant shops in the town center (see figure 2). This situation has fostered widespread dissatisfaction among residents regarding their city's development.

Figure 1: Location(s) of STADTMENSCH Altenburg



(©BBSR 2021)

The STADTMENSCH initiative emerged from this local discontent in 2016 as committed residents sought innovative ideas and spatial impulses to enhance living conditions in Altenburg (Beerlage 2021:

41). Residents view urban development as a collective responsibility and aim to actively participate in making their town more attractive and livable by promoting accessible projects that benefit the common good. In this context, the STADTMENSCH Festival held in 2018 served as a platform for projects and associations dedicated to the common good. It aimed to make civic commitment visible while promoting networking among initiatives. Prior to this event, civil society engagement was fragmented across various groups focused on their own interests; however, the festival successfully unified these efforts. Following two years of preparation and positive feedback from participants, it became clear that the initiative should continue beyond the festival. This desire for ongoing engagement led to an application for national funding under the call “Shaping the City Together! New Models of Neighborhood Development.” Funding totaling approximately €700,000 – including €50,000 co-financing from the city of Altenburg – allowed STADTMENSCH to emphasize urban development aspects starting in 2019 while significantly expanding its scope and visibility.

The initiative highlights strengths such as citizen creativity and local pride while reframing perceptions of shrinkage as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks. By fostering collective self-efficacy among residents, STADTMENSCH empowers citizens for self-determination while addressing out-migration concerns and providing prospects for younger populations (Beerlage 2021; Reinecke et al., 2024). Stakeholders like the mayor of Altenburg have confirmed STADTMENSCH's positive impact on combating local pessimism (Bochinski et al. 2023).

Positioning itself as a network dedicated to fostering new cultures of participation and social innovation (Bochinski et al., 2023), STADTMENSCH recognizes that its spatial focus is essential for realizing new opportunities for engagement (Reinecke et al., 2024). Since its inception, the network has made urban development tangible through creative strategies such as converting inner-city vacancies into decentralized neighborhood locations or "neighborhood anchors." Engaging participation formats have been utilized to identify areas for action while providing financial support for DIY projects (Beerlage 2021; Fehre 2022; Seifert 2022).

2. Actors and Collaboration

STADTMENSCH was conceived and implemented by civil society actors. While the initial project idea and the concept of decentralized neighborhood anchors originated from the head of the municipal palace and cultural operations, the subsequent development of the application and its implementation were carried out by civil society members. As a grassroots initiative driven by its own goals, STADTMENSCH operates independently of any coordination with or requests from the city of Altenburg. The core group primarily includes the following key actors (Fehre & Seifert 2022):

- » **“Erlebe was geht gGmbH”:** This social enterprise promotes greater social interaction and collaboration in Altenburg and has taken on the responsibility for managing the STADTMENSCH project. Within “Erlebe was geht gGmbH,” the “Farbküche” operates as a creative and cultural space

(formerly an independent social enterprise), along with the “Gründerzentrum Ahoi Altenburg” (start-up center). As such, “Erlebe was geht gGmbH” serves as the central intermediary actor throughout the entire process.

- » The **Förderverein Zukunftswerkstatt Paul-Gustavus-Haus e.V.**: This non-profit association has been active since 2009 and was established in conjunction with the Day of Open Monuments. Its goal is to develop the historically protected Paul-Gustavus-Haus, which has been under monument protection since 1980, into a socio-cultural center in the heart of Altenburg. Given the significance and alignment of this project with the overarching objectives of STADTMENSCH, the association could have played a prominent role in the development process. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis and internal restructuring within the association, its activity level has been significantly lower than what the main organizers of STADTMENSCH had hoped for.
- » The **Jugendverein FACK (Futurists’ Agency for a New Cultural Kick-Off)**: Founded by a group of innovative changemakers, this youth association aims to activate young people by providing them with spaces and resources for engagement. Its goal is to empower youth to become active, self-determined, courageous, and innovative adults, entrepreneurs, and community actors.
- » The **Evangelische Kirchgemeinde Altenburg** (protestant church), particularly the Brüderkirche, is another active partner in the initiative. Its goal is to create a unique space for encounters and creative exchange behind the Brüderkirche, consciously drawing on the tradition of salon culture. This space aims to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences, fostering opportunities for them to meet, connect, and collaboratively explore new forms of community and meaning-making.

In addition to the core team, which has evolved over time, various civil society actors participate in projects and networks, with individuals and initiatives determining their level of engagement. Municipal actors are also integrated into the process, including the city’s castle and cultural operations as well as its cultural management. These entities actively seek connections between their own cultural events and the activities of STADTMENSCH (Fehre 2022, 52). This collaboration is physically represented by the Geschichtswerkstatt (history workshop), developed as one of the neighborhood anchors at the castle site. Additionally, the Office for Urban Development and the Economic Development and Tourism Department play a central role by assisting STADTMENSCH in identifying vacant spaces within the city for establishing these neighborhood anchors (Bochinski et al. 2023, 69). Overall, there is a close connection between STADTMENSCH and the administration at various points throughout this collaborative effort.

3. Project Design and Approach: Initiating Mechanisms for Civic Engagement

STADTMENSCH provides a platform for „urban pioneers“ or „city-maker“, offering spaces and formats for dialogue, encounters, co-production, and co-creation. As a civil society initiative driven by its own goals and not created in coordination with or at the request of the city of Altenburg, STADTMENSCH embodies the belief that participation in urban development must be initiated by civil society itself, as

administration and politics may not adequately fulfill this role. The mindset of the initiators reflects this urgency: “If I don't do it now, nobody will do it for me” (Bochinski et al. 2023: 67).

The initiative benefits from a well-functioning network where individuals with diverse backgrounds and objectives contribute their ideas. The Altenburger „Erlebe was geht gGmbH“ (a non-profit company with limited liability) became the organisational body and funding recipient of STADTMENSCH (Bernhard 2023 and 2024; Fehre & Seifert 2022), significantly enhancing the project's scope and enabling process-oriented work that encourages co-production and civil society involvement in specific projects. This level of engagement would be challenging to achieve within traditional administrative structures or municipal enterprises such as the Schloss- und Kulturbetrieb as active partner of STADTMENSCH (Horn 2022: 111).

STADTMENSCH is characterized by practical funding mechanisms that are organized directly and without lengthy administrative processes. This approach allows a broad group of stakeholders to engage actively, encouraging them to take initiative themselves (Beerlage 2021: 45). By creating conducive framework conditions and supporting both current and future city makers in implementing their ideas for the common good, STADTMENSCH activates residents to shape their city in self-determined and creative ways through various formats and approaches (Fehre 2022; Kammerer 2020; Seifert 2022; Reinecke et al. 2024).

The STADTMENSCH initiative commenced with an open discourse aimed at fostering community engagement from the outset. A gamification approach was employed, featuring an interactive board game designed to involve interested citizens across various locations in the city. This initiative proved highly successful, attracting 187 participants, including the Lord Mayor. Through this engaging format, participants collaboratively developed goals and priorities for future urban development, aligning their visions with those of STADTMENSCH. The "city player" game facilitated playful exchanges about residents' wishes for Altenburg's future, focusing on ideas for transforming public spaces (Beerlage 2021: 43).

Figure 2: The “mobile games café” at work (left) and an example for an “art garden” (right)



(© Martin Albermann 2021)

To implement these ideas, the initiative secured €250,000 in funding for the initiation and realization of civic projects (Seifert 2022, 31). Among the most prominent and visible projects funded were: (1) “#selbermachen” Call for Ideas; (2) “Ringling at a Stranger’s Bell”; and (3) “100 Days, 100 Actions.” These projects exemplify STADTMENSCH's commitment to empowering citizens and translating community input into actionable plans for urban improvement (Fehre 2022; Seifert 2022):

- » **#Selbermachen (#do-it-yourself):** This included a call for the submission of citizens’ ideas, followed by a public voting process in various rounds (see figure 4). In a transparent voting process (with a total of approximately 3,700 votes), citizens determined which proposals would receive funding and be implemented. Ultimately, 19 out of 53 submitted ideas were selected for support, leading to initiatives such as an “art garden” (see figure 3) a “mobile games café” (see also figure 3), and the establishment of a youth network (Bernhard 2023; Beerlage 2021: 47). This process emphasized low-threshold access, minimizing bureaucratic hurdles to encourage participation. Citizens had the opportunity to apply for financial support for their engagement ideas through a do-it-yourself competition. It was essential that these ideas focused on the common good and were situated in the public spaces of Altenburg.
- » **"Ringling at a Stranger’s Bell"** serves as second key initiative within the STADTMENSCH network, aimed at encouraging people from diverse ages and social backgrounds who might not otherwise engage in shaping Altenburg's future (Kammerer 2020). The selection process involves randomly identifying households by throwing darts on a city map, ensuring an unbiased approach to outreach (see figure 4). Once selected, representatives visit these households to invite residents to become active participants in their community. Each household is offered €1,000 to implement their ideas for enhancing public spaces or to realise their idea. While participants are responsible for realizing their projects, STADTMENSCH provides support throughout bureaucratic processes such as obtaining permits for setting up objects (Beerlage 2021, 51; Fehre 2022, 64; Kammerer 2020). This approach faced challenges in implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated contact restrictions, which hindered planned activities and participation.
- » **“100 Days, 100 Actions“:** Another project initiated by STADTMENSCH was a call for citizens, initiatives, associations, and committed individuals to engage in an action in Altenburg's public spaces every day for 100 days. STADTMENSCH provided a daily budget of €100 for implementing these actions. As a result, public spaces in Altenburg were creatively utilized on 95 out of the 100 possible days (BBSR 2021: 54).

To conclude, STADTMENSCH acts as a new intermediary between the state, the market, and civil society (Bochinski et al. 2022 and 2023; Brokow-Loga 2022). Empowered by funding from the National Urban Development Policy programme, STADTMENSCH operates independently of the city, focusing on active and creative actions within its network.

In addition to its process-based elements aimed at promoting citizen initiatives, STADTMENSCH originally planned to establish neighborhood anchors throughout the city. These decentralised contact points were designed to generate numerous impulses for the urban society, such as the “Farbküche,” which promotes art projects in public spaces and offers graffiti and painting courses (Bernhard 2023 and 2024). While each neighborhood anchor shares the overarching STADTMENSCH vision, they operate independently under individual sponsorship (Fehre 2022). The hub of this network is the OpenLab, located in the town center. Serving as an event venue and co-working space, the OpenLab provides an open area for exchange among all actors in Altenburg (see figure 5). It also functions as the start-up laboratory for the STADTMENSCH initiative, branded as “Ahoi Altenburg.” This start-up lab promotes ventures oriented toward the common good that provide social or ecological value to the community and aim to mitigate the outflow of young, qualified workers. The initiative seeks to establish a functioning start-up ecosystem by offering co-working spaces, assistance with business plan development, and access to a network of advisors. Currently (2021-2025), funding for the start-up lab comes from the Swiss Drosos Foundation.

Figure 3: The OpenLab and the start-up laboratory as central infrastructure



(©Mario Jahn 2020, <https://www.lvz.de/resizer/v2/RG7JMR7PWWN3IMQ7GOQF37SP6A.jpg?auth=560adf94cf41ef8a4ed1469e2672dbd8b4dac9b97ca4d0d5d37abb6fc2bc172&quality=70&width=1200&height=630&smart=true>)

Looking at STADTMENSCH, it can be summarized that the structure follows a decentralized approach. It consists of an inner circle with a few key individuals, including two full-time positions, and a loose external network of community initiatives, public institutions, and citizens, as confirmed by the initiative's main managers (Bochinski et al. 2023: 69). Opportunities for involvement range from participation in networking events to acting as project organiser. Decisions are made based on the principle of do-ocracy: those who engage in specific areas gain decision-making power and

responsibility (Bochinski et al. 2023; Fehre 2022; Seifert 2022). The funders and STADTMENSCH management team serve as inspirational figures, regarded as “caretakers” and “leaders” (Beerlage 2021: 41).

STADTMENSCH does not align itself politically within urban development but primarily aims to empower individuals through self-efficacy experiences. Although it identifies as a network oriented toward the common good – a sentiment echoed in interviews – this is broadly interpreted through voting on project proposals and outcomes from initiatives. By fostering alternative forms of engagement without rigid association structures, STADTMENSCH reduces internal coordination processes and emphasizes project implementation (Fehre & Seifert 2022). The framework established by the STADTMENSCH game provides guidance while allowing flexibility for various projects. Additionally, STADTMENSCH revitalizes public spaces temporarily through campaigns and collaborates with citizens to initiate lasting visual changes in the urban landscape (Bochinski et al. 2023: 70). The small size of Altenburg enhances networking opportunities; short distances facilitate frequent encounters among residents, sparking conversations about urban space and generating ideas for engagement (Beerlage 2021).

4. Findings: Co-Production or Parallel Production? STADTMENSCH’s Contribution to Urban Development and Social Resilience

From 2019 to 2021, STADTMENSCH received a total funding of €700,000, which supported 35 projects. Additionally, several community-oriented projects and initiatives emerged in the wake of STADTMENSCH but did not receive institutional funding. Notably, the funding was exclusively allocated to projects initiated by residents or citizen initiatives, reflecting that the formats were directed solely at actors within civil society. This underscores that STADTMENSCH originated from grassroots efforts rather than being developed at the request or in close consultation with administration or political bodies.

Despite this independence, both politicians and municipal representatives – particularly the mayor and representatives from the Economic Development Department – attribute a pioneering role to STADTMENSCH: “They have initiated many changes and shaken up the city! This is crucial because an administration cannot be the sole driver of change; ideas must emerge from the community” (own translation from the statement of the Head of the Economic Development Department; Beerlage 2021, 31). This acknowledgment confirms that STADTMENSCH has actively contributed to breaking through pessimistic views of Altenburg while establishing new perspectives, innovative ideas, and networks within the city (Bochinski et al. 2023: 68).

Through this multitude of activities, STADTMENSCH creates the potential to counteract feelings of powerlessness and pessimism in the peripherally located city with a positive image transformation, both internally and externally. The establishment of neighborhood anchors as fixed cooperation points

provides decentralized hubs throughout the city, serving as a counterpoint to numerous vacant spaces. These anchors facilitate exchange and networking while receiving recognition from municipal authorities, including urban development and economic promotion. Most importantly, they transform the area into decentralized locations managed by local changemakers, generating numerous impulses for community engagement.

All neighborhood anchors share the same “STADTMENSCH vision” but operate independently under individual sponsorships, making them particularly sustainable and resilient (Fehre 2022: 56). Their effectiveness varies; for instance, the OpenLab at the market serves as STADTMENSCH's central anchor, functioning as a meeting place, event space, creative workshop (Farbküche), co-working space, and project management hub. Even after funding ends, the OpenLab remains economically viable by offering conference rooms and artistic facilities while providing a key point of contact for citizen initiatives (Seifert 2022). The Farbküche has significantly contributed to dialogue-oriented processes and enhanced public spaces through initiatives like art galleries (see figure 6). Additionally, the Hofsalon at Brüderkirche has developed into a community space for encounters, discussions, and celebrations due to active participation from the congregation, serving as a connecting element between different city areas (Fehre 2022: 57). The Geschichtswerkstatt at Altenburg Castle only gained visibility towards the end of the project due to its location and changes in leadership within the municipal operations.

Figure 4: Shaping the city together with cardboard houses



(© Jens Paul Taubert 2021; <https://www.farbkueche.org/2021/10/01/stadt-gemeinsam-gestalten>)

Beyond these neighborhood anchors, STADTMENSCH has implemented additional community-oriented projects that have helped reduce vacancies in the city. Notably, a youth café (Jucé) was established under youth responsibility for one year. Currently, the youth association FACK (“Futurists’ Agency for a New Cultural Kick-off”) utilizes new spaces and initiates various temporary activities to promote ongoing youth participation. Furthermore, other examples include creating “third places” through STADTMENSCH initiatives (e.g., “Schnitt & Schnittchen”), which make significant contributions to an active urban society.

The decentralized structure of STADTMENSCH is a key factor in its success. In addition to a core group of a few individuals, including two full-time staff members, the initiative comprises a loose external network of civil society actors, public institutions, and private individuals (Fehre & Seifert 2022; Beerlage 2021; Bochinski et al. 2023). Opportunities for involvement range from participation in networking events to serving as project organisers. This approach encourages a broad group of stakeholders to engage actively and take initiative. By creating conducive framework conditions and supporting both current and future city makers in implementing their ideas for the common good, STADTMENSCH empowers residents to shape their city in self-determined and creative ways through various formats and approaches. The number of projects submitted, the votes cast during project selection, and participation in initiatives like “100 Days, 100 Actions” demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy – although individual actors, such as the “Förderverein Zukunftswerkstatt Paul-Gustavus-Haus,” were not able to engage as intensively as initially planned. The do-ocratic model relies on citizens willing to voluntarily contribute to urban development; however, if insufficient participants emerge or individuals feel disengaged, initiatives like STADTMENSCH could struggle. Nonetheless, the network's ability to motivate many residents significantly contributes to its success. The small size of Altenburg facilitates networking opportunities; short distances lead to frequent encounters among citizens that spark conversations about urban space and generate ideas for engagement (Beerlage 2021; Othengrafen et al. 2024).

The question arises regarding how well the administration recognizes and supports the impact of STADTMENSCH (Bochinski et al. 2023, 71). While there is some coordination and collaboration with this innovative intermediary actor, positioned between the state, market, and civil society, it operates as an independent entity rather than an extension of the municipality. This has led to productive collaborations, such as assistance in identifying vacant urban spaces for establishing “neighborhood anchors” (Bochinski et al. 2023: 69). However, overall collaboration appears to have room for improvement. Some civil society actors express frustration over the administration's lack of initiative; often, it reacts to needs rather than proactively engaging with STADTMENSCH and other citizen initiatives. Initially, the challenge for the network was to encourage broader participation. In 2018, even decision-makers in Altenburg paid little attention to the initiative. However, federal funding significantly increased media coverage and political interest in STADTMENSCH (Beerlage 2021: 67), leading to heightened engagement from local politicians and citizens alike. The financial support from the federal government provided a legitimizing effect for STADTMENSCH, resulting in greater recognition of its

activities and increasing the willingness of the administration to collaborate with STADTMENSCH (Beerlage 2021; Othengrafen et al. 2024).

At the same time, a key question arises regarding whether STADTMENSCH truly embodies co-production or if it resembles more of a parallel production model. The chosen structures allow for ideas, projects, and initiatives to be developed and established outside of the administration, including innovative participation formats. This raises uncertainty about the role of the administration in these processes: Is it merely a supporter, or does it aim to play a more active role in collaboration with STADTMENSCH and political entities? A preliminary approach can be seen in discussions about establishing a citizen fund modeled after the “#selbermachen” initiative to jointly promote community-oriented projects. However, questions remain about who STADTMENSCH serves in its urban development efforts and how its actions are legitimized. While urban actions impact many residents, decisions are made at the project level, which can create challenges since STADTMENSCH explicitly positions itself as non-political and denies public responsibility despite the visible impact of its initiated projects and activities (Bochinski et al. 2023: 75).

Regarding social resilience, it is important to note that STADTMENSCH's approach has been comprehensive. The easily accessible micro-funding for small projects has facilitated low-threshold participation from individuals, expanded partnerships, and encouraged an active citizenry. However, opportunities for participation are not equally available across all segments of the community. Although this disparity was acknowledged through initiatives like “Ringling at a Stranger’s Door,” it will need greater consideration moving forward to ensure inclusivity within STADTMENSCH's efforts.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The STADTMENSCH initiative in Altenburg has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of civic engagement and community-driven urban development. Through its various projects and collaborations, several key lessons have emerged that can inform future initiatives aimed at fostering active participation among residents. These lessons highlight the importance of community involvement, collaboration, and inclusivity in creating sustainable urban environments.

- » **Importance of Community Engagement:** The success of STADTMENSCH demonstrates that active involvement from residents is crucial for urban development. By fostering a sense of collective responsibility, communities can effectively address local challenges.
- » **Utilization of Local Resources:** The initiative highlighted the value of leveraging local creativity to reframe negative perceptions into opportunities for growth and revitalization.
- » **Need for Decentralized Structures:** A decentralized approach allowed various stakeholders, including individuals or citizen initiatives, to engage meaningfully without being hindered by bureaucratic processes, leading to innovative solutions tailored to community needs.

- » **Collaboration Between Sectors:** While STADTMENSCH operated independently from municipal authorities, its collaboration with local government was essential in identifying opportunities and resources, illustrating the potential benefits of public-civic partnerships.
- » **Challenges of Inclusivity:** Despite efforts to promote participation across diverse groups, disparities remain in engagement levels among different segments of the community. This highlights the necessity for ongoing strategies aimed at inclusivity.

As we look toward the future, it is essential to build upon the experiences garnered from the STADTMENSCH initiative to enhance its impact on urban development and citizen engagement further. Identifying actionable steps will ensure that lessons learned translate into effective strategies that address current challenges while capitalizing on existing strengths within communities. The following recommendations outline potential avenues for advancing civic initiatives like STADTMENSCH:

- » **Strengthening Partnerships with Local Government:** Future initiatives should focus on enhancing proactive collaboration with municipal authorities to ensure that citizen initiatives align with broader urban development goals while maintaining their independence.
- » **Expanding Funding Opportunities:** Continued exploration of diverse funding sources beyond national programs could support more projects and enhance sustainability, particularly after initial funding periods end.
- » **Fostering Inclusivity in Participation:** Developing targeted outreach strategies can help engage underrepresented groups within the community, ensuring that all voices are heard and included in urban development processes.
- » **Evaluating Long-Term Impacts:** Implementing mechanisms for long-term evaluation of projects will provide insights into their sustainability and effectiveness over time, helping refine future approaches based on empirical evidence.
- » **Promoting Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices:** Establishing networks for sharing experiences among similar initiatives can facilitate learning and inspire new ideas for civic engagement and urban development across different contexts.

Attachments

References

- Beerlage, A. (2021): Altenburg. In: Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR) im Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (ed.): Stadt gemeinsam gestalten! Neue Modelle der Koproduktion im Quartier, Bonn, 25-71.
- Bernhard, H. (2023): Bürgerschaftliches Engagement – Altenburg soll wieder leben, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 09.01.2023, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/initiative-stadtmensch-100.html> (lastly accessed on 26/05/2025)
- Bernhard, H. (2024): Wie Altenburg gegen Abwanderung kämpft, 10.01.2024, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/visionaerinnen-von-nebenan-eine-initiative-gegen-abwanderung-in-altenburg-dlf-ada353df-100.html> (lastly accessed on 26/05/2025)
- Bochinski, S.; Drilling, J.; Mayer, T. (2022): Zwischen Zivilgesellschaft und öffentlicher Verwaltung. Perspektiven koproduktiver Stadtentwicklung abseits der Großstadt., RaumPlanung 217 (3/4), 95–97.
- Bochinski, S.; Drilling, J.; Mayer, T. (2023): Koproduktives Altenburg – Mehr Teilhabe in der Stadtentwicklung? In: Brokow-Loga, A. (ed.). Corona und die Stadt. Kommunale Beteiligungskultur in der Krise? Bielefeld: transcript, 61-79.
- Brokow-Loga, A. (2022): Teilhabe in der Krise? Kommunale Beteiligungskultur in Thüringen während der Corona-Pandemie. In: Institut für Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft (Hg.). Wissen schafft Demokratie. Schwerpunkt Demokratie unter Druck, Band 12. Jena, 116–127
- Fehre, A. (2022): STADTMENSCH. Ko-Entwicklung von Stadt und Gesellschaft. In: Fehre, A.; Seifert, S. (eds.): Radikal Subjektiv. Drei Jahre „Stadtmensch“ in Altenburg – Vier Erzählungen. Altenburg, 44-69.
- Fehre, A.; Seifert, S. (eds.) (2022): Radikal Subjektiv. Drei Jahre „Stadtmensch“ in Altenburg – Vier Erzählungen. Altenburg, https://www.stadtmensch-altenburg.org/app/download/13348155031/Publ_160x230_low.pdf?t=1665388939
- Horn, C. (2022): Ich zweifle, also tu ich. Über Retrospektive und Proespektive Zuschreibungen von Erfolg. Fehre, A.; Seifert, S. (eds.): Radikal Subjektiv. Drei Jahre „Stadtmensch“ in Altenburg – Vier Erzählungen. Altenburg, 96-121.
- Kammerer, A. (2020): Altenburg – Eine Stadt kämpft gegen den Niedergang, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 02.11.2020, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/altenburg-eine-stadt-kaempft-gegen-den-niedergang-100.html> (lastly accessed on 26/05/2025)
- Reinecke, E.; Reisch, N.; O'Neill, D.; Othengrafen, F. (2024): Citizens as urban pioneers: setting impulses for community development in medium-sized towns in Germany; in Othengrafen, F., Herrmann, S., Pencic, D.; Lazarevski, S. (eds.): Social cohesion and resilience through citizen engagement: A place-based approach (pp. 163-190). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035317103.00023>
- Seifert, S. (2022): Wir alle sind unsere Stadt! STADTMENSCH – Unsere Idee von einer koproduktiven Stadt. In: Fehre, A.; Seifert, S. (eds.): Radikal Subjektiv. Drei Jahre „Stadtmensch“ in Altenburg – Vier Erzählungen. Altenburg, 14-41.

<https://www.stadtmensch-altenburg.org/>

https://www.nationale-stadtentwicklungspolitik.de/NSPWeb/SharedDocs/Projekte/Pilotprojekt/altenburg_stadtmensch.html

<https://www.farbkueche.org/>

UPRUN was cofunded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Erasmus+ National Agency for Higher Education (German Academic Exchange Service). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



This project has received funding under ERASMUS+ Cooperation Partnerships programme. Project No 2023-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000167004.

