

FROM THE BEGINNINGS
Beginning tales from the Bikes and Rails

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Abstract

This research project aims to reconstruct actions and transmit what constitutes the collective practice of the self-organized housing group Bikes and Rails. This research aims to show how people can take responsibility for the communal houses they live in themselves and thus emancipate themselves from profit-making property management companies. The research is situated in practice theory and utilizes the concept of collective orientations from the documentary method by reconstructing action practices. Grounded theory as a research methodology supplies this project with the methodological framework for drawing conclusions from the data. The findings of this research are used to make recommendations to the Bikes and Rails housing collective, as well as to the field of housing studies. The synthesis of the data reveals that the collective has, despite its exhaustion from the implementation phase, adopted well-functioning instances from the implementation phase and can navigate through alarming situations in an inclusive and collective fashion. The collective experienced the beginning and transitioning phase of the project together. These collective experiences pose an important factor in the integration of new members as they constitute the collective orientations. Additionally, the research shows that inclusive practices constitute the collective orientation of the Bikes and Rails housing collective.

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INTRODUCTION

Bikes and Rails is a self-organized and governing model housing project for affordable housing (Bikes and Rails, 2024; City, 2024). This bachelor work aims to reconstruct actions and transmit which practices constitute the collective orientations of the Bikes and Rails housing group. By demonstrating how people can take responsibility for the communal houses they live in themselves, this research highlights the potential for emancipation from profit-making property management companies.

The relevance of this research project arises from the lack of empirical data in the steadily growing sector of participatory housing, which should therefore be scientifically accompanied. The research is situated in practice theory and utilizes the concept of collective orientations from the documentary method by reconstructing action practices. Grounded theory as a research methodology provides the framework for drawing conclusions from the data collected.

An initial workshop followed by group discussions serves as the means to engage with the participants and collect data. The collected audio data is transcribed, sampled, and analyzed. Grounded theory guides this process, ensuring methodological rigor. The methods are carefully selected to offer the participants the highest possible level of agency, thereby enriching the research outcomes.

PREMISE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This bachelor's thesis, responds to the recommendation for action from the study "Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen in Wien – Bedarf und Ausblick" by Freya Brandl and Ernst Gruber, which states the need for,

"promoting the development of robust, adaptable housing models, supporting self-organization through increased social science support and situational mediation services." (Brandl & Gruber, 2014).

The relevance of their study is emphasized by the commissioning authority, namely Vienna's municipal department number 50. One of the tasks of this department is housing research, conducted by UIV Urban Innovation Vienna GmbH.

SITUATING THE RESEARCHER

I have been part of the Bikes and Rails housing collective since 2018. My participation includes two years in the implementation phase and four years within the residential group. I am a member of the structure tandem team within the community working circle, one of the four main working circles in our self-governing structure. This involvement gives me a deep understanding of the group and its structure, which will serve as valuable points of reference for this research.

Undoubtedly, my involvement in the Bikes and Rails housing collective introduces a certain bias, which I will strive to make as transparent as possible. In my current role, I am responsible for tasks such as onboarding new members and organizing the group's strategic retreat, where I conducted the initial workshop for this bachelor thesis project.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This empirical research analyzes the collective practice of the Bikes and Rails housing project. The purpose of this work is to contribute to the empirical understanding of housing studies, participation, and self-government. Additionally, the transdisciplinary workshops and group discussions with the members aim to share the findings with the respective group.

RESEARCH INTEREST/ QUESTION

Which collective practices constitute the Bikes and Rails housing collective?

THE CURRENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The research focuses on the collective that co-created the Bikes and Rails housing project and the building itself. The self-governing group currently comprises 31 adults and 14 associated minors. Participants opted to reside in and manage a residential building that is part of habiTAT, the Austrian Tenement Syndicate. This nationwide association, modeled after its German counterpart, aims to permanently remove houses from the financial market (Habitat, 2024). The Bikes and Rails housing project, as a building assembly, has constructed the first new building within habiTAT. Other housing collectives within the syndicate either renovate existing houses or are in the process of construction, such as the group "Living for Future" (Hausprojekt Living for Future, 2024).

The establishment of the Bikes and Rails association in 2015 marks the inception of the current housing association, indicating a nine-year existence, with four years dedicated to the shared living phase since 2020. This research contributes to further understanding building assemblies and can guide future studies. Additionally, the findings can be utilized to provide recommendations to the Bikes and Rails housing collective, facilitating better integration of new group members, for instance.

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

FROM A BUILDING ASSEMBLY TO A RESIDENTIAL GROUP

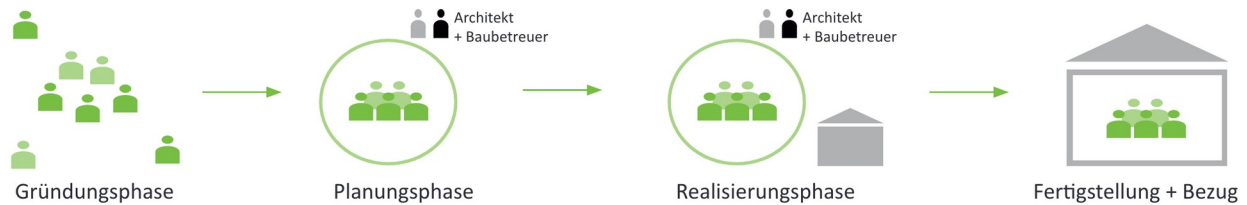


Abb. 17 Ablauf eines Baugruppenprojekts

Table: (Hendrich, 2010)

In accordance with Petra Hendrich's work on "Baugruppen," the building assembly can be understood as the term describing private initiatives of multiple people forming an association with the goal to collectively and self-determinedly develop a housing project (Hendrich, 2010).

A residential group exists beyond the goal of building together and is constituted by a common vision of how to share time and space in the building. Most building assemblies aim to become a residential group as they share a vision of how the shared house will be used. At the same time, this is not necessarily the default case, because a building assembly can also only be used to fulfill self-determined housing needs and fulfill only a few communal purposes after the construction is completed. The Bikes and Rails-Building Assembly is preceded by the continuation of the Bikes and Rails- residential group (Hendrich, 2010).

In order to improve the readability of this work, I will refer to the group as the Bikes and Rails housing collective, or simply the group. The transition from the building assembly phase to the residential group phase remains relevant for analysis, as this period significantly contributed to the collective's shared experiences.

PARTICIPATION IN HOUSING

A building assembly represents a specific form of participation in housing. An example of the conceptualization of participative housing is presented by Blazek, Samec, Kubala, and Orcigr (2023), who define participative housing as needing to meet the principles of democratic control, intentionality, and active involvement among residents. In their recently published paper on the framework for participatory housing in the Czech Republic, they also propose further social science research to refine and enhance their conceptual framework.

In her study "10 Jahre 'Soziale Nachhaltigkeit' Bestandsaufnahme und Ausblick", Reven-Holzman (2019) highlights the relevance of participatory housing in Vienna, emphasizing the potential of participatory housing for social sustainability in a society that is becoming more individualized and complex.

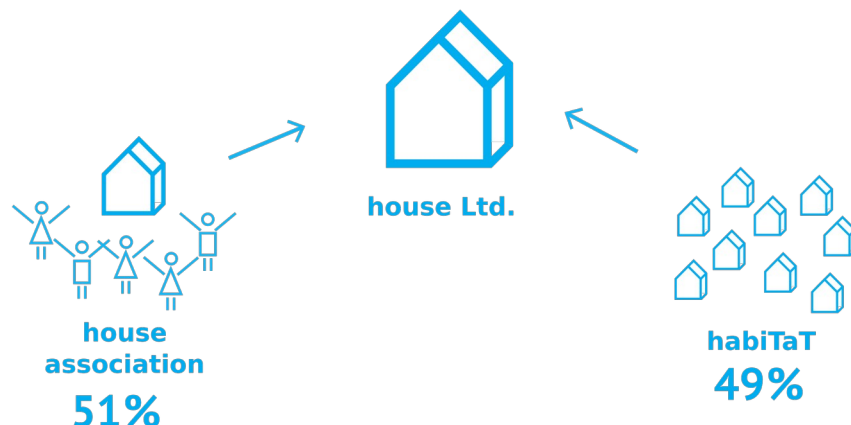
Generally, it can be said that participatory housing is growing in popularity because the gap between landlords and tenants is ever-growing. Therefore, participatory housing is a legitimate approach to recalibrate the relationship and power structures between landlords and tenants (Blažek et al., 2023).

HABITAT/ USER OWNERSHIP & CAPITAL NEUTRALIZATION

The habiTAT is an attempt to recalibrate power structures on the housing market, with its legal model which makes it possible that residents have the ownership of use while the value ownership over the building is split off and dissolved. This is achieved through the transfer of the value ownership to a legal entity and the rights of use, to the house community.

"The legal form of habiTAT is intended to ensure that the value ownership can no longer be separated from this structure and thus remains withdrawn from the property market in the long term. The aim is therefore to communalise properties and their use and maintenance while at the same time eliminating speculation and personal enrichment." (HabiTAT, 2024)

Every member of the Bikes and Rails housing collective or housing association becomes a member of habiTAT by participating and living in a habiTAT housing project. This means they are also part of the wider association.



INCLUSION AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

A further pillar of the habiTAT are inclusion and self governance which I include here as translated quotes, as the text expresses the ideas most accurately.

“The inclusion model builds on the central value of diversity and describes it as a wealth. Diversity refers to the infinite number of different concepts and ways of life, the appreciation of which indicates a positioning that offers orientation for (social) action as a guiding principle. This concept attempts to realise the concrete utopia in which people encounter each other on an equal footing with their particularity and uniqueness. The idea of freedom and equality is at the centre of communal coexistence. The equality and value of each individual also reflects the basic idea and ideals of modern democratic conditions and emphasises the recognition of heterogeneity. In this way, the model of inclusion offers structural framework conditions that promote the assumption of (self-)responsibility and empowerment.” (HabiTAT, 2024)

The habitAT association would represent the point of view, that “heterogeneous residential communities cannot be forced, but must be determined by the residents themselves. Self-management means the equal co-determination of all active participants, regardless of financial participation (no formal hierarchy, no preferential rights) and the necessary transparency of operational processes. The prerequisite is to find appropriate and suitable decision-making structures (e.g. sociocratic consensus, discussions instead of majority decisions). Self-organisation offers residents the opportunity to meet their needs and promotes the highest level of participation. As self-organisation is threatened by private ownership, a link to the idea of capital neutralisation is essential.” (HabiTAT, 2024)

SOCIOCRACY AND CONSENT

The Bikes and Rails Group follows the fundamental components of sociocracy. Sociocracy is a (self-) governance system that is based on the principle of equality. Sociocracy allows for collaborative decision-making while maintaining a high degree of efficiency. Its implementation is popular in viennese building assemblies.

Sociocracy's principles are that all participants make decisions based on informed consent, and that working groups are arranged into semi-autonomous circles that are connected to one another by their members. Consent in this context means that no member has a serious objection to proposed resolutions. Only a portion of sociocracy was implemented by the Bikes and Rails Group, which means that, in contrast to other sociocratic organizations, the group decided that the plenary, which consists of all group members, is the most significant decision-making body. In contrast, other sociocratic organizations have top circles. (Endenburg, 1998)

SOLIDARITY

Derived from a text on the Bikes and Rails housing collective's website, the attempt to live in solidarity begins with the collective planning and building process of the house. The building offers space for cultural, social, and societal initiatives. The commercial space on the ground level is rented out to businesses oriented toward the common good, aiming to serve as a meeting point for the neighborhood. Additionally, the house provides affordable living space to refugees who experience discrimination on the housing market.

The organizational and financing model in the solidarity network habiTAT allows for self-determined living regardless of financial reserves: the necessary funds would be raised collectively by the housing collective and external supporters using private direct loans.

This approach can be associated with the romantic anarchist reading of the term "solidarity" that emerged after 1848. The latter champions the term solidarity for its ability to prefigure alternative social possibilities in spaces liberated from the grip of the state (Kipp, 2016). Regardless of the inclusive and exclusive potentials that solidarities carry, in this reading, the term serves as both a goal and an instrument, motivated by the commitment to the idea that "organizing spaces should bring into being the alternative worlds they seek to create" (Kipp, 2016).

In addition to this visionary reading of solidarity that holds the group together, Durkheim's definition of mechanical and organic solidarity also applies. Mechanical solidarity refers to shared values within the group, while organic solidarity is characterized by the interdependence of diverse participants (Britannica, 2010). "At the appellative level, 'solidarity' is usually taken to be a self-evident concept that denotes the idea of supporting each other" (Kipp, 2016).

PRACTICE

This bachelor thesis is deeply rooted in the practice paradigm, driven by its transformative potential for academia and its profound implications for life on our planet. This transformative potential seeks to transcend existing problematic dualisms and modes of thinking (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 10).

In theoretical exploration, disciplines such as philosophy, science and technology, cultural theory, and social sciences engage with practice (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 10). Given the Social Sciences' predominant role in this work, I delve into the utilization of practices within this field, drawing insights from scholars like Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. Their perspectives entail liberating activities from the rigid grasp of objectified social structures, questioning individual actions' status as mere building blocks of social phenomena, and transcending rigid action-structure oppositions (Schatzki et al., 2005, p. 10).

The Bikes and Rails housing collective's mission revolves around challenging existing power dynamics in the housing market, perfectly aligning with the opportunity to analyze the transcending of action-structure oppositions facilitated by practice theory. Thus, adopting a practice approach in this bachelor thesis is not only fitting but essential.

According to Schatzki (2016), practices are dynamic, open, spatially and temporally distributed collections of actions and speech, guided by shared understandings, purposes, goals, emotions, and rules.

"Material arrangements" encompass the connections among individuals, organisms, artifacts, and natural entities. In the context of this thesis, these arrangements may include the Bikes and Rails housing association, the Bikes and Rails- Society for Solidarity-based Housing Projects Limited Liability Company, the building itself, or the habiTAT Association for the Promotion of Self-managed and Solidarity-based Forms of Housing and Living.

Practices and arrangements intertwine in various ways, with practices influencing, utilizing, and shaping material arrangements, while arrangements, in turn, direct, prefigure, and facilitate practices. This intricate relationship ranges from the occurrence of specific rituals within a particular setting to complex constellations such as the economy. (Schatzki, 2016)

The complexity of these bundles, from simple relationships to composite constellations, underscores the multifaceted nature of practices and arrangements in shaping social realities (Schatzki, 2016).

Focusing on the actual practices of participants offers the researcher a valuable opportunity to discern the underlying meanings and attitudes that precede or are embedded in their practices. (Bohnsack, Geimer, Meuser, 2018, p. 123). This phenomenon is referred to as collective orientations, a concept that will be explored further in the following chapter.

COLLECTIVE ORIENTATIONS

In this research, the Bikes and Rails housing collective is consistently referred to as a collective. The shared ideals of affordable housing and participation in the habiTAT syndicate are key factors that constitute a collective identity. The shared organizational and decision-making procedures clearly indicate that, in everyday language, one can refer to the group as a collective.

Nevertheless, the term "Bikes and Rails housing collective" is used as the object of research because the collective is central to this thesis. Here, the collective represents a collective orientation, which can be understood independently of the specific group (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2021: 123).

Karl Mannheim introduced a theoretical concept of collectivity known as the "conjunctive space of experience," which transcends the individual and specific groups. This space links individuals through shared knowledge, experiences, and meaning structures. Unlike external, coercive forces, this type of collectivity supports interaction and daily practices, creating a sense of unity. In interactions, this manifests as a "mutual understanding in the medium of the self-evident" (Gurwitsch 1976: 178) (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2021: 122).

This also means that, as in the case of the group discussions in the present study, the participants and their statements—especially if discussed in a particularly lively or even heated manner—serve as representations of the collective orientation (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2021: 124), thus transcending the individuals and the group discussion.

These collective orientations become evident in conversations where statements refer to each other, reflecting the shared understanding and meaning among participants. This is particularly true for groups that are ideologically and sociologically relatively homogeneous, as it is the case with the Bikes and Rails association.

GROUNDED THEORY

To build new middle-range theory, Grounded Theory provides this research with guidelines for data interpretation that evolves from the collected data. This inductive process is well-suited for the novel and specific case of the Bikes and Rails housing collective (Schaffar, 2020).

Grounded Theory is a progressive research approach from the social sciences. It prompts the researcher to collect qualitative data and develop a set of codes assigned to the data samples. For this research, memos are written for each quotation and serve as the first level of middle-range theory generation.

The key principles of Grounded Theory according to Bohnsack, Geimer, and Meuser include:

1. Starting with the interpretative understanding of individual cases in their complexity for comparative analysis.
2. Emphasizing the role of the researcher's subjectivity and creativity in the analytical process, following Dewey's concept of problem-solving cycles.
3. Viewing research as a collective enterprise of a Community of Practice, extending beyond the research team to the entire scientific community.
4. Understanding research as a work process collectively produced in practice.
5. Seeing social reality as a context of complex phenomena requiring a rich and differentiated theory, with variation and process as central dimensions. Theory is conceived as an ongoing process

(Bohnsack et al., 2018).

MATERIAL

THE CURRENT BIKES AND RAILS ASSOCIATION

The group currently consists of 31 adults and 14 associated minors. The participants decided to live in and operate a residential building that is part of habiTAT, the Austrian Tenement Syndicate, a nationwide umbrella association with a German partner organization. This association aims to permanently remove houses from the financial market. The Bikes and Rails housing collective, as a building assembly, has constructed the first new building in the habiTAT Austrian Tenement Syndicate. Other housing collectives in the syndicate have either renovated houses or are in the process of building new ones.

EMERGENCE OF THE BUILDING ASSEMBLY

After the initiators, including the architectural firm Reinberg ZT GmbH and the bicycle entrepreneurs United in Cycling GmbH, won the property development competition “Bauträgerwettbewerb” for the municipally subsidized building site at Sonnwendviertel-Ost with their convincing building concept Bikes and Rails, the respective building assembly “Baugruppe” began to develop.

RECENT TRANSITION

The group has recently transitioned from a building assembly to a housing collective. Before receiving the keys to the residential units in May 2020, the group shared a common goal: inhabiting the shared building. Afterward, the group needed to reorganize as a residential group actually living together in the same house. Since then, there have been several personnel changes in the group, including moves in and out. In a self-organized group, this also necessitates knowledge transfer and, eventually, a reorientation of the group's values and visions.

THE BUILDING

The building features a small music room and a wood workshop in the cellar, both shared by the group. Additionally, there is a rooftop where communal gardening takes place. The private units are situated between these levels and are accessible through a shared loggia, which also serves as a communal area. Two rooms on the ground level are rented out to a bicycle shop and a cafe. The communal room on the ground level is partially rented out to initiatives and also serves as a meeting point for the plenary.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES OF THE HOUSING COLLECTIVE

The Bikes and Rails housing collective transitioned its organizational structures from those of the Building Assembly to those of the residential group during the initial three years of living together in the building.

Previously, the group operated with 8 working groups, each tasked with specific responsibilities. However, it later shifted to a model with 4 larger working circles. These circles—named "working circle office," "working circle outside," "working circle community," and "working circle house"—consist of tandems, typically comprised of two members responsible for specific tasks.

The plenary serves as the decision-making body, delegating tasks to the working circles. When issues arise requiring additional time and workload, the plenary can form action teams to develop resolutions. These action teams take on tasks assigned by the plenary. The plenary meets once a month, with all members of the group attending.

Before decisions are made, tandems, working circles, or action teams articulate and share their proposed resolutions prior to the plenary meeting. Additionally, an online forum provides an additional means of communication within the group.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

INITIAL WORKSHOP

Together with my study colleague, Emma Enzi, a collective reconstruction was conducted, drawing inspiration from an action research seminar with Andrea Schaffar that was attended during studies at the Cross-Disciplinary Strategies Department.

The objective of this workshop design was to gather various collective perspectives on the group's history, providing an additional point of reference for further analysis of the group's collective practices (see appendix A).

The workshop took place on April 14, 2024, during the strategic retreat (Klausur) of the Bikes and Rails housing collective. One of the agenda points agreed upon by the group was to conduct a collective reconstruction along a timeline that had been defined prior to the workshop, divided into the sequences 2015-2018, 2018-2020, 2020-2022, and 2022-2024.

A STRATEGIC RETREAT AND COLLECTING AUDIO DATA

Within the context of this Bachelor thesis, the workshop aimed to gather data representing the various collective perspectives within the Bikes and Rails housing collective, which are assumed to have developed over time. Despite this, the organization of the strategic retreat day was undertaken by my housemate C. and me. This involved arranging childcare, lunch, and developing and implementing agenda points.

Throughout the day, a silent discussion was conducted on flip charts. Before the lunch break, another group member provided a refresher on the basics of Sociocracy. Following the initial workshop described here, the group revisited the issues raised in the silent discussion and concluded the day with an appreciative group activity.

Five days before the strategic retreat, an announcement was made via the group's online communication tool, Discourse, regarding my intention to record the group discussions of the reconstruction workshop, referred to as "Gruppenarbeitsteil" in previous announcements. However, the proposal to make audio recordings caused irritation among some members of the Bikes and Rails housing collective. As a result, it was decided not to record the thematic block of the reconstruction via audio recording, following a sociocratic discussion led during the strategic retreat itself.

The group insisted that information revealed in this workshop remain unpublished. Consequently, data from the observation protocol recorded by Emma Enzi and me was also excluded. This process underscored the importance for the group that collectively shared spaces and meetings are collectively designed. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for new methods to be introduced with sufficient lead time for acceptance by the group.

INITIAL WORKSHOP DESIGN

The initial workshop is held in the communal space of the Bikes and Rails housing collective. Emma Enzi, the external facilitator, explains the method and procedure to the participants (see Appendix A).

Upon the groups' return to the larger circle, the posters will be arranged chronologically, and each participant will have two minutes to share the findings of the reconstructions conducted within their groups. This process collectively reconstructs an overall chronology of the group's most significant events (see Appendix A).

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The concept of conducting group discussions is rooted in the intention of enabling a natural flow of conversation among participants, facilitating the analysis to extract collective orientations from the dialogue. The composition of participants in these group discussions is determined based on an

understanding of natural group dynamics, informed in part by the initial workshop conducted prior to the discussions.

In structuring the group discussions, it is crucial to cultivate an environment where all participants feel at ease, closely reflecting their everyday practices. This principle guides both the selection of the location and the composition of participants.

The initial questions posed at the start of the discussions are deliberately open-ended, allowing participants to address topics of relevance to them. Given the researcher's close affiliation with the Bikes and Rails housing collective, withdrawing from the group discussions would create an unusual dynamic for participants.

Discussions draw to a close when participants feel they have adequately expressed their thoughts and a sense of conversational saturation is reached.

CONDUCTING THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Two participants responded to the posting on Discourse, the group's online communication tool, which invited group members to join follow-up discussions after the initial workshop. A group discussion was arranged for the Friday following the initial workshop at the strategic retreat. The other three group discussions were organized through direct messages and private groups in the Signal messenger service. To reconstruct a natural conversation flow, "natural groups" of 2 to 4 people were invited to participate in group discussions. The opening phrases for each discussion varied slightly depending on the situation, but generally, the question posed was similar to those in the initial workshop: **"What was especially important for the group and the project?"**

In each case, an informal conversation mode was maintained during the group discussions. The focus on practice utilizes the organic flow of communication within groups to reconstruct practices and reveal implicit knowledge. The first group discussion was recorded on an iPhone with two female members of the group on the afternoon of April 19th, in a kitchen. A particularly memorable aspect was that all three participants were interrupted by care obligations for their children. This group discussion is labeled as 001_group discussion.

The second group discussion was recorded with three female members of the group on the evening of April 21st, after 8 PM, in a kitchen. This discussion is labeled as 002_group discussion.

The third group discussion took place on the morning of April 23rd in the kitchen of one of the two female participants. This discussion is labeled as 003_group discussion.

The fourth group discussion took place in the afternoon in the kitchen of one of the two male group members. The audio file for this discussion is divided into two parts because an alarm went off on the recording phone, interrupting the recording. This discussion is labeled as 004_group discussion.

All group discussions were held in kitchens because the living units in the Bikes and Rails house have living room kitchens located in the front and well-lit parts of the apartments.

PROCESSING THE DATA

THEMATIC COURSE OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS – SELECTIVE SAMPLING

While reviewing the audio files, the thematic progression of each transcript was outlined, representing the initial stage of data sampling. It was observed that participants shared numerous collective memories, resulting in the rapid branching of group discussions into multiple conversational threads.

The focus was placed on the 003_transcript group discussion, which explored a notable case involving an alarming situation within the Bikes and Rails housing collective. Additionally, samples from the 001_transcript and 004_2_transcript group discussions were examined.

The majority of samples extracted from the 003_transcript group discussion centered around the Bikes and Rails housing collective's response to the increasing interest rates established by the European Central Bank. These rates directly affected the group's variable-rate bank loan, posing a threat to the fundamental principle of affordable housing. The discussion progressed from the initial alarm raised by group members in the office working group, through serious objections to their proposed solution, to an extensive collective process aimed at safeguarding the project and ensuring affordable housing for residents. Ultimately, the resolution involved establishing a solidarity fund for residents with limited financial means and launching a direct loan campaign amounting to 500.000 Euro to fully pay off one of the smaller bank loans.

AN ANALYSIS GROUNDED IN DATA

In Grounded Theory methodology, data collection, analysis, and theory development occur concurrently. The primary question driving this process is, "What is happening here?" During the open coding phase, segments from group discussions are carefully coded line by line, involving comparisons within the text. Representative statements about significant events are compared with similar sections to extract relevant attributes for the emerging theoretical concept (Bohnsack et al., 2018).

The second phase of comparison in Grounded Theory involves employing diverse dimensions from the data to examine the boundaries of the developed theoretical concept. These comparison strategies continue until theoretical saturation is achieved – the point at which no further valuable insights emerge from additional perspectives. Upon reaching this saturation point, the comparison strategy is adjusted.

To facilitate this process, the qualitative data analysis program Atlas.ti is utilized. Each chosen text excerpt is accompanied by a memo, detailing the revealed insights and interpreting the underlying theoretical concepts. Within the program, both the memos and quotations are assigned one or more codes. A total of 51 codes were defined, with 60 memos crafted, all tracing back to the data and the corresponding passages.

The frequent recurrence of attributed codes within the selected samples informs the research direction. The most recurring codes in this study are as follows:

collective action x 29	Workload x 24	finance x 17	group decision x 16	inclusion of participants x 15
group dynamics x 27	plenary x 17	alarming situation x 17	take time x 16	official community structure x 15

RESULTS

From the collected data, it is clear that the group has successfully navigated two phases through collectively developed structures. Significant achievements include planning and building the house together, financing it with direct loans from over 200 private supporters, and removing it from the market with the habiTAT legal construct. Today, the group lives together in this house, managing it successfully themselves, and regularly showcasing the model project to interested parties.

The collective orientation of working in a responsible and professional mode was crucial, particularly during the intensive conception and implementation phase. While this mode of work can be challenging, especially in the face of serious objections, the group consistently manages to make good decisions through consent. Regarding integration into the groups, it is noted that some members, particularly those with children and newcomers, found it difficult to integrate. This is partly due to the urgency of tasks during the implementation phase and the capabilities of knowledge holders to pass on their expertise.

The high level of individual responsibility and group capability inherited from the initial phase remains relevant in the residential phase, to navigate the group through critical situations. For example, during a critical phase identified in the data, the group established a solidarity fund to ensure affordable housing for all members.

It is now possible for the residential group to further promote the integration of new members to cope with the ongoing workload of self-management and prevent fragmentation. This could potentially be achieved through delegating responsibilities, highlighting and appreciating the existing process, and especially through the active education of new members.

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND STRUCTURES

Collective action is vital for the group as the significant workload associated with self-organization can only be managed collectively in the long term. The group's self-organization is demonstrated through jointly developed and agreed decision-making practices, partly adopted from Sociocracy.

The group implements the working circle community to support collective action. This working group proposes structures such as plenary sessions, action teams, or retreats, providing space for collective discourse and enabling effective action. Measures are consistently taken to communicate issues to the entire group, such as during retreats, which requires an additional time investment from participants but results in a better understanding of the overall situation and ultimately solutions that satisfy the entire group.

ALARMING SITUATIONS AND COLLECTIVE MOMENTUM

The office-working circle is mentioned in the sampled data in the context of the rising interest rates of the bank loans. The office-working circle hereby fulfilled a monitoring function that safeguards the project and its inhabitants.

From the perspective of the collected data, collective action can be observed within the Bikes and Rails housing collective, particularly when issues are collectively recognized by the majority. Like it was the case with the rising interest rates after the office-working circle signaled an alarming situation. Collective action becomes especially pronounced when addressing financing or fundamental matters crucial to the project's survival and its core ideal of affordable housing.

PARTICIPATION AND PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Participants with a strong personal commitment to the Bikes and Rails housing collective evidently play a central role in the development and sustainability of the project. Their involvement has the potential to significantly influence the group dynamics and outcomes.

To reach consensus, serious objections are met with interest, despite often being perceived as nerve-racking and challenging in terms of group dynamics. These objections are viewed as essential tools for decision-making. As shown by the quote from the 003_transcript_groupdiscussion, they can lead to much more favorable solutions.

A further task of the working circle community is the onboarding of new residents, which, as shown in the data, can prove to be difficult since knowledge transfer depends on the time, skill and willingness of knowledge holders to pass on their areas of responsibility. Through participation, members experience a higher level of identification with the project and can subsequently take on the necessary responsibility to handle challenging situations.

*Ja, aber ich habe es auch nicht geschafft **reinzukommen**.
Also ich habe auch eben versucht,
von Anfang an bei AG Planung.
Und ich habe es nicht geschafft,
bis nach dem Einzug, im Prinzip da wirklich Fuß zu fassen, weil das einfach,
da schon so **viel Vorwissen da war**, jetzt von J. und so,
(...) Das war voll schwierig, da irgendwie... am
Man hat Motivation, man will sich einbringen.
Ja.
Ja, und man wird aber irgendwie, nicht gelassen.
Und dann irgendwann sagen, okay, dann halt nicht.
Dann mache ich halt nichts mehr für zwei Monate.
Ja, und dann ist halt die Motivation am Boden unten.
Ja.
Und man hat auch dann einfach für nichts anderes mehr Motivation,
was das Projekt betrifft.
Sondern man sagt, okay, dann mache ich halt gar nichts.
4:11 ¶ 568 – 594 in 001_transcript_groupdiscussion.vtt*

To ensure the participation of all new members, the group should invest time and effort in actively onboarding them. This proactive approach is expected to improve integration and participation, potentially preventing fragmentation between generations within the group. Additionally, making the various stages of the project visible to all members, including newcomers, is recommended. Understanding the significant workload and effort invested in the project may encourage new members to actively engage in the residential group.

In addition, offering training programs, such as those in Sociocracy or moderation, after the onboarding process, is expected to enhance the skills of new members, thereby increasing their identification with the project and their level of personal commitment. Moreover, it is proposed to allocate additional meeting times for the group, despite the challenge of finding free time. It is believed that fulfilling the communal time preferences of members may foster stronger community bonds and enhance overall group cohesion.

TWO MORE WORKING CIRCLES

The other two major working circles—the house and the working circle outside—were not mentioned in the sampled data. Nevertheless, as a resident of the building, it is important for me to emphasize that these two working groups, like the others, have essential functions for the continued existence of the

project. Whether it is communication with more than 200 supporters who lend their money to support the project through the working circle-outside or the efforts of the working circle-house in carefully organizing the maintenance of the building's structure, their roles are crucial.

SOLIDARITY MANIFESTS

The three pillars that the Bikes and Rails housing collective has communicated from the first direct loan campaign during the implementation phase until today are “solidarisch, ökologisch, unverkäuflich” (solidary, ecological, not for sale). All of these aspects were mentioned in the collected data.

In this section of the analysis, I will show how solidarity is reflected in one statement of the sampled data. It is clear to the participants that not every member can contribute in the same way, and the acceptance of this circumstance is also a reflection of the ideal of solidarity within the group.

“Was braucht es, damit wir die Direktkreditkampagne so fahren, dass das eben okay ist, wenn die einen vielleicht gar nichts machen, so irgendwie.”

line 133-139 from 003_transcript_groupdiscussion

The group was well aware that not all members would be capable of contributing to an additional direct loan campaign. Despite recognizing that not everyone brings the same resources to the process, the group decided to campaign for more direct loans in the sampled example. This decision aimed to distribute the financial burden of the building across many private loans rather than relying on a single variable or fixed interest rate from a bank, which would result in higher rents.

In general, the group tries to show solidarity with members who are financially underprivileged. This is achieved through the establishment of a solidarity fund, which can be used if rents are too high.

Das mitdiskutiert wurde. Was machen wir mit Menschen, die sich plötzlich nicht mehr leisten können, hier zu wohnen?

354 – 360 in 003_Transcript_groupdiscussion.odt

WORK MENTALITY

*Und dann haben wir eben beschlossen, dass wir auf drei Jahre auf einen fixe Zins umsteigen, dass es irgendeine Möglichkeit von Soli Fond geben soll, dass wir...
P:Für die Mieten, oder?*

Für Leute, Menschen, die das brauchen,

dass wir eben direkt Kreditkampagne, volles Rohr feuern und halt versuchen, so viel wie geht.”

line 185-194 in 003_Transcript_groupdiscussion.odt

The present quote underscores the group's strong work ethic and dedication, despite the demanding and time-consuming nature of their tasks. This commitment is evident even though they are aware that not everyone will contribute equally. The participants approach their high workload with rigorous dedication. Allocating time for communal processes demonstrates the Bikes and Rails housing collective's commitment to inclusivity. The group collectively makes far-reaching decisions and endeavors to ensure that all members are informed and able to consent to these decisions. This culture of transparency and information-sharing fosters inclusivity, enabling participation in activities such as the co-creative use of communal spaces.

TRANSITIONING FROM A BUILDING ASSEMBLY TO A RESIDENTIAL GROUP

The collective has developed remarkably professional, efficient, and expedient practices to managing the far-reaching decisions of the initial phase. Upon moving into the shared house, the group adopted a new structure. The members were exhausted from five years of intensive planning, conceptualizing, and working on the implementation and financing of the building.

The working ethos of the building assembly that oversaw the initial phase was adopted by the residential group. This proved fortunate, as evidenced by the sampled data. For instance, during an alarming situation, the heightened responsibility of the office working circle members effectively alerted and safeguarded the project.

Furthermore, the Bikes and Rails housing collective demonstrated productive capability by coping with a serious objection to a proposed resolution that was initially seen as a good solution to the issue of the rising interest rates.

A high level of personal commitment can result in strong opinions and serious objections to proposed resolutions. However, if members voicing serious objections remain flexible and ready to collaborate on the issue, these objections can ultimately lead to fruitful solutions.

CONCLUSION

Recurring practices, such as dedicating collaborative working time and making sociocratic decisions within established working groups, are pivotal elements of the functioning collective. A high level of individual responsibility and commitment is considered a basic requirement for all members of the collective.

The work-intensive implementation phase, encompassing conceptualization, organization of building, and campaigning for direct loans to fund the project, resulted in collective exhaustion. While the collective is committed to including new members, this goal has been somewhat compromised during particularly intense phases of work. Solidarity, a central aspect of the collective orientation, is exemplified by supportive financial structures.

The field of participative housing studies can obtain from this work that supporting working bodies to enhance their capacity for integrating newcomers is a vital aspect of inclusion. Furthermore, this bachelor thesis underscores the significance of the transition from the implementation phase to the residential phase as a pivotal moment for collective orientations. The implementation phase, coupled with the period preceding the move into the house, constitutes a critical shared experience for the collective. It is worth noting that the workload of a self-managed group is comparable to that of a company, making it feasible only for a specific group of people able to undertake this unpaid labor.

The research indicates that the group should prioritize and cultivate each individual's sense of responsibility towards the collective. By reinforcing personal accountability and commitment, the collective can sustain its cohesion and effectiveness, a practice inherited from the planning and implementation phase. Moreover, the group should explore strategies to effectively support and nurture individuals within the collective.

The thesis recommends actively educating and integrating new members into the group. This entails acknowledging the disparity in collective experiences between long-term members and those who joined during the residential phase. To bridge this gap, the collective should promote new shared experiences through diverse communal practices.

The developed theoretical framework signifies the initial stage of the research process. It marks the beginning of a broader research journey, inviting participation from the scientific community, as encouraged in a Grounded Theory Project.

Bound within the academic context of a bachelor's thesis, this research is subject to certain limitations. However, with potential funding from the MA50, the project could be expanded. This expansion might involve conducting additional group discussions with residents and further developing middle-range theory.

An area for future research could focus on exploring methods to make participatory housing projects more accessible to less privileged individuals through public and subsidized housing initiatives. One potential avenue to consider is offering financial compensation to pioneering groups. However, this idea requires further development and investigation in subsequent research endeavors.

The beginning and transitional phase play a crucial role in shaping the Bikes and Rails housing collective. Their commitment to inclusive practices and the incorporation of responsible practices from the implementation to the residential phase form the backbone of their collective orientation. To further enhance inclusion, it is suggested to share collective experiences with new members and recognize the contributions of the pioneering group. This cohesion facilitates the integration of participants into the Bikes and Rails housing collective, which is vital for sustaining its self-organized practice.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Design of the initial workshop.

Anmoderation Emma Enzi:

Wir werden in den kommenden 1,5 Stunden eine grobe Rekonstruktion der spannendsten Ereignisse in eurer Gruppe anstellen. Dafür bitte ich euch, euch entlang der dargestellten Zeitachse aufzustellen; jeweils zu dem Zeitabschnitt an dem ihr zur Gruppe dazugekommen seid. Bitte schaut das ihr halbwegs gleich große Gruppen macht. Ihr werdet anschließend an die Gespräche in euren Kleingruppen, die Perspektiven die ihr gefunden habt, aus dem jeweiligen Zeitabschnitt, der Großgruppe berichten.

*Jetzt bekommt jede Gruppe ein Flipchart auf dem ihr euren Arbeitsauftrag lesen könnt. Nämlich; **Was ist passiert? Welche Ereignisse waren für das Projekt wichtig? Was, und wie ist das passiert?***

Wann	Wo	Wer	Was	Material
14:00	Gemeinschaftsraum,	Ganze Gruppe, Philipp stellt	Einleitende Worte: +	Flipchartpapier und
14:10	sammeln im Stehkreis nach dem Mittagessen	Emma vor, Sie übernimmt das Anleiten der Methode	Erklärung wie am besten Audioaufnahmen am Handy gemacht werden	Klebestreifen
14:10	Vom	Kleingruppen x4	Kleingruppen sollen	Timeline aus
14:20	Gemeinschaftsraum zu Kleingruppenräumen	mit Emma	sich entlang der Frage: Wer ist wann zu der BnR gruppe dazugekommen bilden.	vier beschrifteten Flipcharts vier Handys die Aufnahmen können
14:20	Cafe/	Kleingruppen	Offene	Vier Flipcharts auf
15:00	Gemeinschaftsraum/ 40min Proberaum/ Werkstatt/ggfls Radraum/ Garten / Terasse als mögliche Räume		Gruppendiskussionen mit Audioaufnahmen	denen der Arbeitsauftrag ausgeschrieben steht.

Wann	Wo	Wer	Was	Material
15:05	Im	Die Kleingruppen berichten	Die Filpcharts werden	Klebestreifen
15:40	Gemeinschaftsraum	ein. Emma moderiert das einberichten, sodass nicht zu viel Zeit bei einer Person hängen bleibt. Zwei Minuten pro Person sind eingeplant	von den Gruppenmitgliedern erläutert und wieder auf die Timeline gehängt so das alle sie sehen können	
15:40	Im	Emma und die Großgruppe	Das gesammelte wird	Hände zum
15:45	Gemeinschaftsraum		wertgeschätzt und von der Großgruppe gefeiert.	Klatschen

APPENDIX B

Relevant overview over the collected data

The audiofiles were transcribed by the program, transcribee, which I generously got sponsored by Jaro Habiger which developed the interface for the program. After downloading the transcripts I listened to the group discussions again, partly corrected the transcripts and wrote down the thematic course of the conversations.

001_transcript group discussion/ 001_audiofile group discussion

002_trancript group discussion/ 002_audiofile group discussion

003_transcript group discussion/ 003_audiofile group discussion

004_1_transcript group discussion/ 004_1_audiofile group discussion

004_2_transcript group discussion/ 004_2_audiofilegroup discussion