seismic germany

Inaugural Forum

15th – 16th October 2014
Instiute for European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

70 participants (mostly from Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia)

Focus Groups

Berlin (26th April 2014): 14 participants
Berlin (28th April 2014): 16 participants
Bochum (7th July 2014): 22 participants (Bochum, Düsseldorf, Essen, Dortmund, Duisburg, Cologne, Wuppertal)

Stakeholder Mix

grassroots initiatives, local interest groups, social innovators and entrepreneurs, urban planners, urban researchers, representatives of foundations, NGOs, artists, cultural managers, a representative of a sports club, representatives of museums, community workers, social workers, a local policy maker, two representatives of the Berlin administration

Identified Issues for Social Innovation

Access to/Redistribution of Means
- increase of conflicts over "urban space" in Berlin as more and more fluid capital flows into the city and public space is privatised
- need for ecological city development (more spaces for nature, gardening, bicycles; car-free cities, reconfiguration of streets, …)
- consolidation of "poor areas" in the Ruhr-region: poor infrastructures, social isolation of certain groups; place of residence as disadvantage; hitherto political interventions not sustainable
- city administrations that are confronted with "public poverty" are losing room for manoeuvre and capacity to intervene: How can these capacities and this room for manouvre be regained (taking a permanent crises of public finances into consideration)?
- unused "empty spaces" and former industrial buildings as potential for alternative forms of city development (Ruhr-region)
- development of new (organisational, financial) forms to supply affordable housing (cooperative, "capital-poor" or revolving)
- development of practical understandings of the notion "commons" with concrete effects on urban life

Participation and Experimentation
- "polycentric city" versus "comprehensive approach"
- How to balance "general interest" and the growing diversity of "individual interests" concerning urban space?
- need for new forms, models, rules as "participation" often serves as a fig leaf for authoritarian, non-transparent or capital-driven processes (frustration of urban initiatives)
- establishement of "participation" as "fourth power" in urban politcal processes
- current state of urban administration as most problematic factor in participation processes? –> improvement of human resources and competences required
- need for new forms of cooperation between administration and urban initiatives ("at eye level", equal access to knowledge)
- local counterpressure and local self-organisation as (more self-confident) alternatives to participatory procedures?

Diversity
- diversity should be recognised as a collective learning matter for urban society
- need for more complex understanding of diversity that includes social differences, lifestyle, property structures, character of businesses etc.
- need for broader discussion on the "quality of urban interactions": Are the different groups in touch with each other or do they live in "parallel words"? How could sites and occassions for "contact" actively created?
- discourses on "migration" should be transformed into discussions about social and political rights; discussions should focus on urban issues – e.g. "education", "infrastructures", "housing" – that concern migrants, they should not focus explicitely on "migrants"
- precarious biographies and life circumstances should be included explicitely in discussions on future city development
- development of new forms of inclusive community work, close to the needs and realities in a respective neighbourhood

Adaptive, Creative and Resilient Cities
- public debt cut(s) as precondition for social and sustainable city development
- development of sustainable food-supply-strategies for cities based on regional products, short circuits, direct contact between producer and consumer
- development of new, "creative" models for financing projects in public interest (citizens' budgets, public private partnership, crowdfunding, public claiming of private wealth)
- stronger emphasis on local initiatives that deal creatively with financial shortage and develop social innovation out of necessity

Central Aspects and Future Areas of Work

Collaboration : Participation
New forms, rules, models, processes of participation have to be developed. Grassroots-participation has to be conceptualised as a "self-evident" part of urban planning and development. Changes in self-images, competences and human resources of urban administration have to be initiated.

Urban Space
The creativity and diversity of civil society/grassroots intiatives should be considered as a valuable resource to plan, develop, re-create urban space. Capital-driven projects and/or authoritarian political processes to distribute urban space have to be counter-balanced. How can the "right" of civil society and urban actors to access urban space be better secured?

Local Knowledge
What is the current connection between the "local knowledge" that urban initiatives/civil society actors acquire in their "daily engagement" and large-scale political urban processes? How can these two aspects be linked in a better way to create participatory and sustainable solutions to shape the urban future?

Community Organisation
Which strategies, models, co-laborations have proven succesful for urban and grassroots-initiatives to anchor their cause sustainably? How do they gain the relevant forms of capital (finances, contacts, knowledge, space…)? Which "unusual alliances" help to promote grassroots ideas and projects?