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Self-Managed Housing in Vienna: Managing Ambivalences Between "Invitability" and Resistance

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Abstract

This contribution addresses how self-managed collaborative housing (CoHo) groups engage in and with urban planning in Vienna and thereby how they manage the ambivalence of simultaneously getting involved in established planning and maintaining their alternative and subversive character. These groups aim to shape their own living environments and contribute to more sustainable, affordable, and collaborative housing and living. The relations and interactions between self-managed housing projects and municipal planning actors are ambivalent and include both invited and uninvited forms of engagement. To be able to realise their projects and to intervene in urban planning, CoHo groups thus need to manage the boundary between making their aims compatible with *and* challenging urban planning visions and strategies. I analyse this by paying attention to how CoHo actors enact "invitability" while maintaining their resistance against certain urban policies. For doing so, I draw on and contribute to literature at the intersection of urban planning and STS that address public participation in collaborations and controversy contexts. The empirical materials stem from a multi-sited ethnography, comprising interviews with members and proponents of CoHo groups, observations of public and semi-public events of, with, and about CoHo, as well as documents and social media posts. I find that CoHo creates invitability by negotiating and working on three aspects that are directly or indirectly challenged by municipal and professional actors: their relevance, expertise, and reliability. They do so by engaging in infrastructuring activities that stabilise both the invitability and resistance of CoHo in Vienna.

Keywords

collaborative housing; hostility; infrastructure; public participation; representation; urban planning

1. Participation in Urban Planning Between Hostility and Embracement

Involving different public, civic, and private actors in shaping urban spaces materially and socially is now widely regarded as both a matter of justice and as key to better planning (Allmendinger, 2001). While public authorities and planners largely welcome and, in fact, invite public participation in planning for introducing new ideas and more immediate access to public needs, they also seek to demarcate, control, and diminish public involvement in specific ways in line with broader planning strategies (Kornberger, 2012). As outlined in the introduction to this thematic issue, in practice, participation is often limited to specific well-framed questions, rather than allowing for the articulation of issues by the participants (cf. Chilvers & Kearnes, 2020; Felt & Fochler, 2010). Participation in urban planning can thus be considered as a case where public participation in shaping matters of collective concern is met with mostly indirect hostilities. This means that even if participation is generally regarded as desirable, established governance logics and entrenched ways of sensemaking in fact limit how participation can be realised in practice. I thus explore how actors who aim to participate in urban planning encounter and navigate hostility by enacting what I call "invitability" (i.e., compatibility with the authorities' expectations of who is suited to be invited to participate) while resisting the pre-framed agendas and upholding alternative issues and values.

The involvement of self-organised collaborative housing (CoHo) in public housing policies in Vienna is a case in point: On the one hand, as it is stated in the current city development plan STEP 2025, "the City of Vienna invites new actors into urban development, who can realise diverse uses. Self-organisation and civil-society engagement are welcome additions of established structures" (Stadt Wien, 2014, p. 11). On the other hand, the established governance logics, planning practices, and administrative and legal regulations of the City of Vienna set indirect boundaries against more autonomous and active involvement of citizens and activists in urban planning and housing strategies (Novy et al., 2001; Sepehr & Felt, 2023), and the realisation of CoHo projects remains dependent on the explicit support and invitation by the municipality. In Vienna, access to building plots for subsidised housing constitutes a major challenge for CoHo. Land owned by the City of Vienna is mainly distributed via so-called builder competitions, where proposals are selected by a jury based on architecture, economy, ecology, and social sustainability. While the latter offers CoHo opportunities in these competitions, succeeding vis-à-vis professional housing projects remains a challenge. Competitions exclusively for CoHo projects remain few.

While the City of Vienna overall appears as a welcoming environment for CoHo (especially in international comparison), the case demonstrates the more subtle mechanisms in which indirect hostilities co-develop with specific forms and practices of participation that attune to, navigate, and negotiate the ambivalent environment in which they are embedded. Notably, "the City" cannot be regarded as a homogeneous entity that acts in completely coherent ways. Rather, different actors and units are involved in the governance of the city, and it differs how these actors relate to and address citizen participation. Against this background, this contribution analyses the case of CoHo in Vienna (so-called *Baugruppen*) and how its proponents negotiate its entanglement in urban planning in cooperative as well as conflicting ways.

To analyse these complex and ambiguous relations, I draw on sensitizing concepts and approaches from STS (Science and Technology Studies), planning and design studies that address cooperation without consensus, and the formation of publics and issues. This article contributes to these debates by developing an empirically grounded framework for analysing invitability, specifically CoHo's compatibility with and

resistance to the public authorities' expectations, and CoHo's engagement with infrastructure in ways that accommodate ambivalences between hostility and openness.

In the following, I first discuss literature that deals with participation in collaboration and controversy. I then introduce the case and my analytical strategy. Next, I present my findings, focusing on three aspects which are negotiated and navigated by the housing groups for creating invitability, namely relevance, expertise, and trust, and elaborating how this contributes to participation infrastructures. In conclusion, I discuss how infrastructuring participation might impact participation in urban planning.

2. Collaboration, Controversy, and Beyond: Literature and Sensitising Concepts

To analyse how housing groups negotiate and navigate invited and uninvited forms of participation, I draw on literature from STS and urban planning that deals with how actors gain credibility to promote their claims and issues (or fail to do so) in cooperative and controversy settings.

Literature on *invited* forms of public participation in research and in planning critically reflects on power relations and epistemic hierarchies in such settings that often hinder a more substantial involvement of publics. STS literature (Granjou & Arpin, 2015; Hackett, 2005; Lengwiler, 2008), for instance, addresses the issue of aligning heterogeneous cultures and knowledge practices, the tensions involved, and its (unintended) effects (Felt et al., 2016; Schikowitz, 2020; Schikowitz et al., 2023). It points to the power relations that are entrenched in the practices and routines of participatory processes that often reinforce hegemonic knowledge hierarchies between scientists and lay people, between Global North and Global South researchers, and among Indigenous knowledge systems (Chilisa, 2017; Latulippe & Klenk, 2020), which often makes knowledge integration an "exclusionary" (Klenk & Meehan, 2015) and extractivist (Latulippe & Klenk, 2020) practice. Similarly, urban planning literature, mostly from a Foucauldian tradition, has criticized ideas of "collaborative planning" (Healey, 2003) based on a Habermasian ideal of rational discourse and consensus as neglecting existing power relations and exclusions in participatory settings (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002; Metzger, 2011, 2013). This critique often goes along with a call for "agonistic planning" (cf. Mouffe, 1999) or "hybrid forums" (cf. Farías, 2016; McFarlane, 2011) based on productive dissent and ongoing political negotiation.

Alongside STS and planning literature on invited participatory settings and their pitfalls, studies that focus on *controversies* ask how citizens and social movements succeeded or failed when they tried to make their concerns heard. STS studies on public controversies (foremost about the regulation of environmental and health issues) have analysed how citizens and social movements have challenged dominant knowledge regimes (e.g., Anglin, 1997; Callon & Rabeharisoa, 2008; Epstein, 1996; Frickel et al., 2010; Kleinman & Suryanarayanan, 2012; Martin & Richards, 1995). These studies analyse how the actors gain or lose credibility within the dynamics of a controversy. Especially Epstein's (1996) seminal study on the role of activists in the development and regulation of AIDS treatments pays attention to how the activists both challenged and contributed to medical research, and it particularly investigates the mechanisms and strategies of the activists for being accepted as relevant and credible stakeholders that are "invited to the table." Benjamin (2013), analysing the controversy around the California stem cell initiative, attends to issues of social justice and critically reflects on the privileged position of powerful patient organisations that might reinforce existing inequalities.

Literature at the intersection of STS and urban studies on knowledge and learning within urban movements (Blok & Meilvang, 2015; De Souza, 2006; McFarlane, 2011, 2012) addresses the tensions when activists get involved in urban governance. These studies focus on how movements develop and express their concerns in ways that are recognisable to the members of the movement as well as to officials and policy actors (McFarlane, 2011, 2012), and what the intended and unintended effects are. Levine (2016) discusses how nonprofit community-based organisations gained the position of nonelected neighbourhood representatives in an urban development project in Boston, USA, and thereby superseded elected politicians. From an STS perspective, Bijker and Bijsterveld (2000) analyse how a self-appointed committee that aimed to include women's needs in the planning of public housing in the Netherlands made planners listen to them. In fact, they could make themselves heard and gain influence on planning but had to balance that carefully by not making explicit political claims and by performing a relatively narrow white, middle-class, and heteronormative conception of women-friendly planning.

Related to in- and exclusions in invited and uninvited participation, the question of representation of democratic publics has been problematised. Summarising relational conceptions of public participation from STS, Chilvers and Kearnes (2020, p. 350) emphasise:

> Far from being external pregiven categories, the subjects (publics), objects (issues), and models (political ontologies) of participation are actively co-constructed through the performance of collective participatory practices, both shaping and being shaped by wider social, political, and technoscientific orders.

In this sense, the question concerning public participation is not how to best represent a pre-given public, but how publics are co-constituted in specific participation formats, together with the issues that are at stake (Marres, 2007). At the intersection of STS and urban studies, scholars like Metzger (2013) and Kornberger (2012) make a similar argument for the involvement of "stakeholders" in urban planning and governance. Criticising the conception of the planner in collaborative planning as a mediator who would select relevant stakeholders and bring them together in planning processes, Metzger (2013) argues that rather "stakeholderness" is actively constructed to include certain actors and issues, and exclude others (for similar arguments from a Foucauldian perspective concerning "citizens" as political subjects see, for instance, Cruikshank, 1999). While these studies implicitly frame the publics that are involved as passive entities that are enrolled by overly powerful planners (cf. De Laet & Mol, 2000), Felt and Fochler (2010) attend to how the participants in different participation formats constitute themselves in relation and demarcation to other publics. This already hints at the ambivalences and subtle entanglements between invited and uninvited participation that are at the core of this article.

I aim to make sense of the entanglements of mutual mobilization, cooperation, and competition, and how CoHo manages these ambivalences to simultaneously make themselves invited yet maintain their subversive and alternative stance. I draw on sensitising concepts that highlight infrastructures and spaces that allow for cooperation without assuming consensus (Dagiral & Peerbaye, 2016; Guston, 2001; LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013; Slota & Bowker, 2017). The notion of "infrastructuring" focuses on bottom-up practices for facilitating cooperation between different actors (Dagiral & Peerbaye, 2016; Farías, 2016) that goes along with the formation of publics and issues. For example, literature from critical migration studies (Kapsali, 2020; Wajsberg & Schapendonk, 2021) has analysed the informal and alternative infrastructuring activities of

people on the move which complement, subvert, and challenge formal policies and dominant infrastructures for managing migration, while relating to the formal infrastructures in various ways. STS-inspired design studies (Bjögvinsson et al., 2012; LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013) emphasise that engagement in designing urban spaces can contribute to "infrastructuring publics" by providing opportunities to meet and exchange knowledge and experiences from which common issues can form. To analyse how "cooperation without consensus" between different political, administrative, and professional actors can take place, Star and Griesemer (1989) introduce the concept of "boundary objects" (such as forms, standards, or concepts) that mediate between actors but hold different meanings for each of them.

This study aims to contribute to these literatures by paying attention to the entanglement of cooperation and controversy, the mutual mobilisation of the actors involved in a specific cultural context, and the possible (unintended) effects of managing the ambivalences between them.

3. Materials and Analytical Strategy

I now introduce my empirical case and materials, as well as how I analysed these materials based on my sensitizing concepts. The analysis is embedded in a multi-sited ethnography around CoHo in Vienna which I conducted in varying intensities between 2018 and 2023.

Most CoHo projects are initiated out of a dissatisfaction with the private housing market as well as the public housing provision (Rogojanu, 2019; Rumpfhuber et al., 2012; Schikowitz & Pohler, 2024). The groups simultaneously challenge and contribute to the governance of housing. CoHo groups and organisations—no matter what their exact aims might be—are involved in shaping matters of collective concern. The City of Vienna invites and restricts their involvement in mostly indirect ways, and the CoHo groups (need to) make themselves compatible with the public authorities' aims and thereby *invitable* in the first place, *yet also* resist these aims to be able to realise different kinds of housing and living (cf. Schikowitz & Pohler, 2024). This case lends itself to the analysis of invited and uninvited participation, and of the co-construction of (indirect) hostilities and participation practices. The various actors are in conflict and competition, yet they simultaneously cooperate and learn from each other, and they try to mobilise each other for their respective targets.

CoHo in Vienna comprises a range of projects with diverse aims (Czischke et al., 2020; Lang & Stoeger, 2018), such as more affordable, sustainable, and communal housing, a de-commodification of housing, or an adaptation of housing options for specific needs, such as aging, new forms of work, different household—and family forms, etc. Many projects want to change not only their own housing situation but also the housing system and urban governance more generally. What they have in common is that a group of future dwellers joins forces and acts as a developer who commissions and engages in the planning, construction, and management of their own building. In addition, there are individuals and organisations who aim to foster CoHo, like associations or umbrella organisations that encompass several projects.

In a multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995), I accompanied CoHo groups to different (mostly public and semi-public) sites and formats where they exchange and communicate amongst each other and with different other actors involved in urban planning, such as municipal policymakers and politicians, urban studies scholars, civil society initiatives, professionals and journalists. I focus here mainly on observation

protocols from about 20 public and semi-public events, talks, and meetings (online and in presence), 8 formal interviews which I conducted with members of different CoHo groups and organisations, as well as documents and social media appearances, following Pink et al. (2016). The direct quotes in the findings are from interviews (*int_number*) and from observations of events (*event_number*), which I translated from the original German. They respectively stand for many similar statements in my materials. To protect the anonymity of my informants, I do not provide unnecessary details when quoting them.

While the observations of events also include utterances of members of the City of Vienna and other actors, my analysis for this article focuses on the perspective of the CoHo members and proponents. Thus, when I refer to the hostilities that these actors encounter, this reflects their experience of hostilities, rather than providing factual statements or my analytical findings about the stance of the City of Vienna. Likewise, I do not judge if the concerns of and about CoHo are justified or not.

The analysis of these materials is interpretive, based on open and focused coding, and accompanied by mapping relations between actors. These methods facilitated theoretical sampling and generated observations and ideas for further analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). In particular, the mapping directed my attention to the fact that the diverse actors—both individual persons and organisations—were entangled in various ways and that these actors assemble and re-assemble in various constellations at different events, projects, and initiatives. This observation that there were no clearly delineated sides through which the actors could be separated, sparked my interest in the entanglement of invited and uninvited forms of engagement in the first place and guided further focused coding and analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

The analysis is mainly based on the concepts of "invitability" and "infrastructuring." When analysing how CoHo enacts what I call invitability, I paid attention to how they anticipate and experience the public authorities' (implicit and explicit) expectations about what would make them eligible to be invited to participate, and how they seek to meet these expectations (cf. Epstein, 1996). Thus, in a first step, I analysed what hostilities the CoHo proponents experienced, and how they saw overcoming these hostilities as necessary to become invited to participate. In a second step, I analysed which strategies the CoHo proponents applied to actually overcome the hostilities and to create compatibility with the public authorities' expectations, both in ad hoc and more stable ways. I found that while seeking compatibility, CoHo proponents simultaneously tried to uphold their own autonomy and their critical stance that might contradict the authorities' expectations.

To make sense of this entanglement of mutual mobilization, cooperation, and competition, and how CoHo manages the ambivalences involved, in a third step I analysed CoHo's infrastructuring activities (Bjögvinsson et al., 2012; LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013). Infrastructuring goes beyond ad-hoc strategies to allow for invitability, by creating more stable structures (Slota & Bowker, 2017) that grant CoHo eligibility to participate in urban planning and housing. Simultaneously, infrastructuring provides CoHo with opportunities to stabilise not only their fit with the authorities' expectations, but also possibilities to resist and counter-act the City's housing policies and to realise alternative ways of housing and living. I thus analysed CoHo's infrastructuring activities (building on the heuristic by Schikowitz et al., 2023) that stabilise both invitability and resistance. I paid attention to how they build material structures and spaces that allow for the formation of publics and issues (cf. Bjögvinsson et al., 2012; LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013); organisational structures, legal models and standards (cf. Slota & Bowker, 2017; Star & Griesemer, 1989) that anchor CoHo in administrative and legal frameworks, as well as shared narratives and arguments

(cf. Felt, 2017; Sepehr & Felt, 2023) that legitimise and normalise the involvement of CoHo in urban planning strategies.

Yet, infrastructuring cannot be done by the housing groups alone. They need to mobilise the City of Vienna and other actors, which in turn try to stabilise their own agendas and likewise enrol CoHo for their ends. Infrastructuring thus coproduces specific forms of participation with forms of co-option *and* subversion.

4. Findings: Creating Invitability

In the following, I present how the housing groups encounter and address hostilities, mainly by political and administrative actors, but also by professionals like building contractors or construction companies. This concerns how CoHo proponents perceive hostilities and how they act according to this perception.

I find that the groups navigate and negotiate mainly three interrelated hostilities to constitute and manage their invitability into urban planning processes that concern (a) relevance and representation, (b) expertise, and (c) trust and reliability. In a final section, I revisit these findings and elaborate on how CoHo proponents engage in infrastructuring to stabilise both their invitability and their resistance.

4.1. Negotiating Relevance and Representation

CoHo proponents perceived it as hostile that, in their view, some representatives of the City of Vienna discredited the relevance of CoHo for broader urban populations and their needs, and simultaneously posted excessive demands and expectations of what CoHo should achieve for their neighbourhoods. In the following, I reflect on how housing groups react to these hostilities by stressing their own relevance, yet distancing themselves from excessive demands and co-option for goals that they do not share.

Overall, the accusation concerning the low accessibility of CoHo by broader populations is perceived as unfair, and CoHo proponents relate it to the City's hostility, as one of my interviewees points out:

> The City is, I would say, supportive only to a very limited extent towards us *Baugruppen*....And because of this [lack of support], our projects are accessible to others only to a limited extent. So you need a lot of skills, know-how or be willing to acquire that, to have this access and to get to the next step, so that it is also possible for broader layers of the population. (int_4)

Related to this, the housing groups see themselves confronted by what they frequently refer to as "the bobo accusation" (event_6). The term "bobo" (the short form of *bourgois bohémien*) is used for the inhabitants of certain "hip" city quarters (such as Berlin Kreuzberg or Neubau in Vienna), who are often well-educated, economically well-off, and adopt elements of a DIY and counter-cultural aesthetics and lifestyle. In the alleged view of City representatives, CoHo proponents would adopt a bottom-up rhetoric and aesthetics, while actually furthering their own interests or even contributing to gentrification processes. They are addressed as belonging to an already privileged group that is far removed from the needs and problems of the working class which is still seen as the primary addressee of Viennese social democratic politics. These concerns are perceived as dismissive, as they run counter to the self-understanding of most CoHo proponents and they mostly counter this accusation vehemently. They emphasise that they are, instead,

engaged citizens who devote energy and spare time to contributing to the public good, using their privileges for, rather than against, those who do not have the resources to engage in bottom-up projects. To demonstrate the relevance of CoHo for broader populations, the housing groups foreground the concrete benefits they create for whole neighbourhoods, fulfilling the City's expectations. These social achievements, such as kindergartens, event spaces, or refugee apartments, correspond well with the housing groups' common values and aims. Yet, the housing groups often perceive the expectations as too high, pointing out:

> [CoHo] almost got abused for invigorating a neighbourhood or so, with many requirements. And there we also need to demarcate ourselves and say, hey, yes, we make a lot of things happen, but that can't be a replacement for a proper social system, or neighbourhood work, or whatnot. So, the City can't sit back and leave everything to the *Baugruppen*. (int_7)

Housing groups thus try to navigate between highlighting all they can achieve for the neighbourhood and exempting themselves from fulfilling what they regard as duties of the city. The high expectations and demands of the City concerning neighbourhood services are thus perceived as indirect hostility, as highlighted in the use of the term "abuse" in different contexts that I encountered. This would not only demand a high investment of work and resources from the CoHo groups, but it would also privatise public duties, and in this way counter the aim of many CoHo groups and organisations to resist neoliberal developments, as expressed in their statements against the commodification of housing. One way of positioning CoHo as beneficial for broader populations and simultaneously limiting the direct services and benefits it needs to provide for the neighbourhood is to frame housing projects as exemplars or prototypes for innovative housing. These examples may be few in number but could be learned from and scaled up in the long run by the city and other actors. They often link this framing to the City's strategic planning goals. E.g., in the announcement of an event, a CoHo organisation says:

> The Smart City Strategy of the City of Vienna calls for social innovation, to spare resources and maintain quality of living in the city. Who, if not the Viennese [collaborative] housing projects could be a source of such a social innovation in the area of housing? (event_5)

To further emphasise their innovativeness, CoHo groups document and highlight when their projects are involved in exhibitions, publications, or receive awards (cf. Schikowitz & Davies, 2024). In this way, the relevance of CoHo shifts to their role model status, rather than to their number. Here, however, the danger of co-option and of misusing the projects to further the prestige of companies or to legitimate the policies and strategies of the City of Vienna is indeed acknowledged. Echoing a repeated reaction, one of my interview partners pointed out in an ironic tone:

> They [building contractors and city administration] would say, "Oh, we have so much work with these mini projects"…but if you look at which projects they display in their agencies, most of them are collaborative projects. And also the showcase [CoHo] projects, that they [the representatives of the City of Vienna] show to international delegations, to prove how *cool* the City of Vienna is [laughs]. (int_7)

Here, what annoys the interviewee besides the fact that the agencies and planners take credit for the housing projects while trivialising them at other occasions, is that by doing so, the City is buying into the

same logic of co-opting alternative models that they implicitly impute to CoHo with the "bobo accusation." Besides posting critical comments about the City's planning strategy and their entanglements with business actors on social media (cf. Schikowitz & Davies, 2024), the groups counteract this danger of co-option by using the neighbourhood services and physical facilities that they provide in ways that are suited to foster resistance. In other words, they are engaging in "infrastructuring publics" (LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013) by providing "space for initiatives" (int_3) and formats where the neighbourhood dwellers can exchange and organise and where common issues can emerge—for instance, a group that challenges car-centric planning, organises events and protest activities around this issue, and provides a physical infrastructure of non-commercial bike-sharing and repair facilities that offer and facilitate alternative mobility practices and bring together those who support these issues. While these offers could be mobilised by the City and by companies to promote how "cool" the neighbourhood is, they would simultaneously contribute to the formation and organisation of publics who resist certain policies.

In sum, to stress their broader relevance, CoHo groups present themselves as prototypes to be learned from and that can potentially be scaled up for creating more active and lively neighbourhoods. Simultaneously, to mitigate the co-option of their projects for adverse goals, the CoHo groups use their facilities and activities to mobilise the neighbourhood to create and realise alternative visions of sustainable and just housing.

4.2. Establishing Expertise

Next to the alleged challenges to their relevance, CoHo proponents often feel that their professionalism and expertise are discredited. In interviews, my interlocuters would often bemoan that building contractors, architects, and other professionals with whom they cooperated would not take their decisions and requirements seriously, and often tried to overrule them by sticking to their standard solutions, because they think "they know how it works anyways" (event_6). It then required further interventions, arguments, and conviction to explain that certain decisions were not arbitrary "but that there was a consideration behind it" (int_5). Similarly, the housing groups encounter hostility, for example, when in debates planners complain that housing groups would insist on their own planning decisions even against expert advice.

To counter these concerns, CoHo proponents often highlight the amount of certified professional expertise available in their groups by staging the expertise of single group members, who are architects, planners, or researchers. They often highlight their double expertise as professionals who also possess lived experiences in self-organisation as members of housing groups and other initiatives. In this way, while drawing on established sources of credibility such as certified professional expertise, they try to enlarge and shape what is regarded as legitimate expertise in relation to urban planning—e.g., I repeatedly encountered the claim that those engaging in CoHo would be "experts in democracy" (event_3). Further, expertise in creating and maintaining sociality and togetherness is foregrounded. In one panel discussion, this was highlighted by stating that the city would "provide the vehicle-body, but the thing does not drive yet, there you need a bit more…a social body" (event_2) that CoHo would create. Sometimes, it is even mentioned as a benefit of housing groups that they would not be too professional, that they would sometimes be "a bit naïve" (event_5), which would let them try new things that might spark experimentation and innovation, even if they would be somehow risky or ambitious.

The public discussion events where CoHo proponents appear on the podium play a crucial role in the enactment and stabilisation of alternative forms of expertise. Often, CoHo representatives organise events

and discussion formats and invite various experts from professional realms and the city administration, as well as some representatives of CoHo groups. In this way, these persons are established as experts (cf. Grundmann, 2016; Limoges, 1993). They are subsequently invited to other events. In this way, CoHo proponents achieve a place at the table by first creating their own tables and, in this way, proving themselves as invitable. In addition, many CoHo groups and organisations emphasise their expertise by cooperating with and mobilising researchers. They are usually very open to contributing to research about their projects. Moreover, CoHo proponents increasingly set up their own research projects.

Summing up, to counter hostility concerning their expertise, CoHo proponents simultaneously highlight the certified expertise of individual members and cooperation partners, and they attempt to enact counter-expertise that builds on lived experiences in self-organization and on engagement in critical research. This not only stabilises the credibility of CoHo proponents, it also re-interprets how credibility is understood (cf. Epstein, 1996).

4.3. Building Trust and Reliability

A third kind of hostility that CoHo encounters is that of city officials and professionals who are not used to working with emerging and collectively organised groups. Here, indirect hostility is based on the uncertainty of how to cooperate with unfamiliar entities and lacking practices and routines for doing so. Direct hostility is often derived from a lack of trust owed to assumptions about, and first- or second-hand experiences with, unreliable groups. I was often told that officials and professionals sometimes insisted on CoHo spokespersons who were formally entitled to make decisions for the group. This insistence is often at odds with collective self-organisation, particularly the emergent and iterative character of the formation, renegotiation, and adaptation of group structures and procedures. As a relatively recent phenomenon, the housing groups do not neatly fit into the existing municipal funding categories. Thus, for the city administration, CoHo projects are hard to grasp and categorise through formal processes, and the groups encounter a certain suspicion that they might just use certain categories strategically for their own advantages. A city representative who was sympathetic towards CoHo expressed this ambivalence between emergence and stability at a panel discussion:

> There needs to be trust from the side of the City to allow for something which we can't define exactly from the beginning…but on the other hand, we also saw that it is important that those who apply [for public funding; i.e., housing groups] also live up to this trust by being really stable groups. (event_2)

This shows that the apparent intangibility and fluidity of the groups is also a trust issue. Establishing trusting relations with city officials is often done by drawing on personal contacts between individual group members and city officials. Cultivating such personal relations requires some investment of time and effort; individuals need to be present, make themselves known, and prove their trustworthiness and reliability— "for them [the City] it needs this contact partner [from CoHo], and you need to work hard for that" (int_7). While others acknowledge the value of these mediating persons for CoHo, these overlaps of community interests and personal interests are also regarded with suspicion, as one interviewee considered: "So, yes, that was good for us, but they also used their connections for themselves and did not communicate everything" (int_7).

On the side of the City, some individuals who are open towards CoHo or who share specific values or political stances with a group, were ready to support them and act as gatekeepers and mediators to the city administration (which does not imply lobbying for self-interest in the sense of corruption or nepotism, but rather lobbying for a shared sense of a public good). They did provide informal knowledge about administrative procedures or put across to the city administration that "this is something that the City wants to foster…because they saw the potential of the project" (event_5). In short: These actors trusted in CoHo and helped to mitigate the City's hostility. Yet, "depending on the goodwill" (int_7) of these gatekeepers and personal contacts is also something that constrains CoHo and that hinders a more general upscaling beyond case-by-case decisions, and a more active and self-determined involvement in urban development.

Beyond personal contacts, there are attempts to make CoHo as a whole more graspable and establish trustworthiness and reliability in the long run. Here, organisations that represent several housing projects play a crucial role. On the one hand, they try to convince policymakers and professionals that CoHo is reliable, they "tried to explain to them [the city administration] what *Baugruppen* are…so, when they have a procedure, what are criteria they can apply in a jury to assess? Is this a real *Baugruppe*?…So we presented them a paper, where we tried to propose a new model" (int_7). On the other hand, there are attempts to shape CoHo to fit this model to ensure mutual trust and reliability.

Making heterogeneous and fluid groups reliable involves standardising and homogenising them to a certain extent. To define what CoHo is means to define what is not part of it. For example, in workshops, some organisational and financing models, legal forms, procedures to reach decisions, and ways of relating within the group, are promoted and recommended as especially suitable for CoHo in Vienna. Groups are encouraged to assemble their individual model from these recommended building blocks. Specific kinds of self-presentation towards the outside and even standardised ways of arguing the aims and benefits of CoHo can be observed as a form of "narrative infrastructure" (Felt, 2017) that can be used for creating recognisability and trustworthiness. At different events, I encountered almost identically phrased arguments repeatedly, and I heard the same anecdotes to illustrate them in different contexts. Also, often technical arguments were blended with political arguments (cf. Schikowitz & Davies, 2024), arguing, e.g., that certain ownership or financing models would better correspond with the value of de-commodification of housing, they would help to mitigate certain social problems that would often arise in groups, and simultaneously be more easily applicable within the Austrian context.

4.4. Infrastructuring Invitability Between Subversion and Co-Option

CoHo groups' perception of mostly indirect hostilities and the ways they try to enact their invitability as a response, demonstrates the co-production of participation in the ambivalent Viennese planning culture. Building on the analysis so far, I now re-examine the findings to explain how CoHo groups engage in infrastructuring activities to stabilise both their invitability and their alternative stance.

Overall, infrastructuring appears as necessary, as the dependence on personal contacts and sizing the few opportunities for getting access to building plots and for engaging in planning strategies is perceived as problematic by CoHo proponents. One of my interviewees put that in a nutshell:

> And I would say, there is a critical relation to the City.…So, on the one hand, it is our aim…to create models, lighthouse projects, that are counter-models and that show that you can do housing differently

and that you can even do that without the City. But it would be even better if we could do that with the City. (int_4)

Based on this desire to secure counter-models and to simultaneously work together with the City, CoHo also involves more long-term infrastructuring activities, to build and stabilise invitability and resistance in specific ways. I now re-examine how infrastructuring, which includes material, organisational, and narrative elements (Schikowitz et al., 2023), is done to stabilise relevance, expertise, and trust, and how boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) figure in it.

First, CoHo creates material facilities, platforms, and community offers. They serve as boundary objects, as for the City they represent neighbourhood services that contribute to a lively and peaceful togetherness, especially in city development areas. In addition, these offers are used as assets that valorise a neighbourhood for economic purposes. Yet, simultaneously, the facilities and events are sites where issues and publics can emerge and that could become focal points for resistance, e.g., against the commodification of public spaces (cf. Bjögvinsson et al., 2012; Corsín Jiménez, 2014; LeDantec & DiSalvo, 2013).

Second, to contribute to legal frameworks and funding categories, CoHo proponents engage in the development of definitions, standards, and models. These constitute another set of boundary objects that facilitate interaction between administrative and professional actors, and housing groups. For the City, these categories and definitions make CoHo groups more interpretable in an administrative sense, and they create a certain reliability and calculability, which allows the city to include them in planning strategies and urban development. For the housing groups, the categories likewise facilitate organisation and make internal and external collaborations more efficient. Yet, they provide a means for protecting CoHo from excessive demands, as well as arbitrariness, by allocating clear responsibilities and rights.

Third, infrastructuring activities comprise the rehearsal of shared stories and arguments as "narrative infrastructures" (Felt, 2017), that interweave a shared reference to the past of Viennese (housing) policies with references to innovativeness and togetherness of CoHo (cf. Sepehr & Felt, 2023). These narrative infrastructures facilitate cooperation, but they include struggles over interpretations of togetherness, solidarity, and the distribution of responsibilities between the City and self-organised citizens. In some settings, such as strategy documents, these conflicts are put aside to allow for cooperation, while in others, such as debates, protest, and political initiatives, they are staged to maintain the respective identity and political stance of each actor in agonistic ways.

As a result, most of the newer housing groups in Vienna have adopted what has been called the "Viennese model" of CoHo (Lang & Stoeger, 2018), which consists of variations and combinations of specific material and architectural forms, organisational building blocks, as well as a specific way of narrating and presenting themselves. Using these models makes initiating and organising CoHo easier and more efficient. In discussions and interviews, this is often described as "not needing to invent the wheel anew." While for the first groups in Vienna it took about a decade from the group formation until moving into their houses, the newer projects can be realised in only a few years. This efficiency makes the groups more accessible for those interested, and more reliable and predictable for external actors from the city administration and professional firms who cooperate with housing groups, helping to create invitability into planning processes. However, standardisation and infrastructuring might also reduce heterogeneity and diversity of groups, as it

not only mobilises external actors but also mobilises and disciplines CoHo groups themselves to fit this model and to make themselves invitable.

In sum, the infrastructuring activities in which CoHo in Vienna engages, allow for cooperation of several actors but also allow each to maintain their own agendas and identities. Sometimes, these agendas overlap (as with the standards and definitions), sometimes they subvert each other in subtle ways (as with the neighbourhood offers), and sometimes they are in conflict (as in the case of narratives).

5. Conclusion

Throughout the findings, the multiple, ambivalent, and shifting relations between the various actors involved in the governance of the City of Vienna, and the different CoHo groups and proponents, became evident. This relates to indirect hostilities stemming from entrenched values and obdurate practices (Hommels, 2005) that have been established during a long tradition of expert-based and ideologically driven planning policies of the social democratic city government, which has even been described as paternalistic (Novy et al., 2001; Rumpfhuber et al., 2012; Sepehr & Felt, 2023). For this reason, CoHo proponents try to infrastructure invitability by establishing their relevance, expertise, as well as trust and reliability. They do so in ways that are compatible with the City, but that simultaneously are true to their own issues and values that might challenge City policies. Thus, mimicking the City's indirect ways to frame and foreclose certain ways to participate, CoHo does not create invitability as an end in itself, but as a means to contribute to and to subvert the City's housing policies and realise alternatives. In this sense, not only is the City both hostile and open towards CoHo, but CoHo is simultaneously hostile and open towards the City, co-producing hostilities and forms of participation that are specific for the indirect and ambivalent Viennese participation culture.

Thus, infrastructuring of CoHo in Vienna can be regarded as creating and stabilising agonism (Farías, 2016; Mouffe, 1999), which does not necessarily strive for consensus but creates the conditions for an ongoing political struggle, where coalitions and interactions are possible but are also constantly re-negotiated. In this way, the infrastructuring activities maintain housing as a political issue, rather than reducing it to a technical problem. Such a politicisation overall caters to both activist and municipal stances and might help to delay neoliberal developments towards commodification and financialisation of housing.

Yet, while infrastructuring serves to maintain resistance, the literature on how civic actors make themselves heard in planning processes hints at the fact that official recognition often goes along with a certain internal homogenisation and exclusions of the less compatible elements and aspects of a movement (cf. Bijker & Bijsterveld, 2000), and thus might involuntarily contribute to a reinforcement of established practices and power structures. Similar observations have been made about CoHo groups that are less compatible with the City's expectations and that rather try to stay unobtrusive in a hostile environment (Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Schikowitz & Pohler, 2024). These groups might thus be marginalised in the CoHo community and in planning (although also less visible participation can have an influence). The standardisation involved in infrastructuring might bear the risk of homogenising CoHo internally and excluding aspects of CoHo that do not lend themselves as boundary objects (Slota & Bowker, 2017). I would thus make a case for seeking ways to maintain CoHo's diversity, next to infrastructuring invitability and resistance in one specific way, including an ecology (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2020) of different collaborative forms and models that go along with diverse publics and issues.

The case of (un-)invited participation of CoHo in Vienna demonstrates the subtle mechanisms in which indirect hostilities co-develop with specific forms and practices of participation based on managing boundaries that attune to, navigate, and negotiate the ambivalent environment of the Viennese planning culture.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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