

Towards a “Freiburg Model” of Housing for the Common Good? Fostering Collaborative Housing in Urban Development

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Abstract

As the social and ecological costs of capital-driven housing markets become increasingly apparent, local governments are (re)establishing collaborations with housing organizations that prioritize affordability and sustainability over profits. This hesitant re-orientation, however, takes place under conditions of strained local budgets and the inscription of market principles into existing public policies and planning law. In this article, we develop an interdisciplinary perspective on the interplay between municipal housing policies, planning and legal frameworks, and collaborative housing organizations in the district development project “Kleineschholz” in Freiburg, Germany. Promoted by the local government as being 100% oriented towards the common good, multiple elements of the project are geared towards community involvement and a close dialogue between public bodies and housing organizations. At the same time, the local government and administration navigate divergent interests within and outside municipal institutions, multi-level legal frameworks, financial constraints, as well as institutional routines. We trace how the project’s common-good orientation is integrated into the co-productive process between housing policy, planning law, and collaborative housing groups. Our analysis centers on the process of concept-based tendering which is a key municipal lever for the project’s orientation towards the common good. Moving beyond the situated district of Kleineschholz, we outline the potentials and challenges of translating an orientation towards the common good into collaborative district development, against the background of present political and legal frameworks.

Keywords

collaborative housing; common good; community-led housing; concept-based tendering; municipalities; transformation; urban planning law

1. Introduction

Housing provision in many municipalities worldwide bears the stamp of a decades-long prioritization of market dynamics, private property, and financial interests (Aalbers, 2017; Madden & Marcuse, 2016). As the social and ecological costs of capital-driven housing markets become irrefutable, several municipalities have tentatively (re)turned to collaborations with community-led housing groups (Grubbauer & Metzger, 2023). Such a reorientation by municipalities, however, takes place under conditions of strained local budgets and the inscription of market principles into policy and law (Balmer & Gerber, 2018). As a consequence, state institutions exhibit divergent and partially contradictory roles as (retrenching) providers of (affordable) public housing, supporters of various forms of housing development (from cooperative to profit-oriented), all the way to acting as a “real estate state” (Stein, 2019) that caters to the needs of capital.

In response to the distortions caused by market-based housing development—and exacerbated by much-needed mitigation of, and adaptation to, ecological challenges (Cucca et al., 2023)—a “third way” of housing development (Tummers, 2016, p. 2024) as a niche beyond market and state is gaining attention. Respective projects are alternately framed as “community-led,” “collaborative,” or “cooperative” (Bates, 2022; Sørvoll & Bengtsson, 2020). Yet, the main actors of these housing developments are diverse, ranging from large and long-standing cooperatives that navigate the spectrum between tenant orientation and business considerations in varying ways, to small groups adopting different legal forms to provide alternatives to market-driven housing development. In this article, we use the term “collaborative housing” to encapsulate various organizations that prioritize goals other than profit (see Section 2.1).

Collaborative housing groups come in many shapes and sizes and their orientation towards the common good is not necessarily reflected in a charitable legal form (for an overview see Vestbro, 2000, p. 29). This challenges public authorities to identify and address organizations oriented towards the common good. Additionally, the translation of what “common good” means in collaborative housing practice is subject to different viewpoints and positions. Focusing on a specific case of urban development, namely the district of Kleineschholz in Freiburg (Germany) that shall be developed exclusively with actors oriented towards the common good (Stadt Freiburg, 2023a), we trace the complexities behind the practical implementation of said ambitions. We address the question of how the idea of “common good” is integrated into the co-productive process and, in particular, in the concept-based tendering (*Konzeptverfahren*) for the urban neighborhood Kleineschholz. Our focus centers on the public tender as a crucial fulcrum between local housing policies, the engagement of collaborative housing organizations, and the legal as well as financial conditions within which the project is set. In doing so, we develop a critical understanding of the process of implementing an orientation towards the common good while navigating the tensions and interactions between housing organizations, local politics, and legal frameworks.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section, we situate our study within current academic debates on new forms of collaborative housing and the role of municipalities. In Section 3, we detail our methodology and contextualize the characteristics of Kleineschholz in Freiburg’s housing landscape and policy. Section 4 traces distinctive features of the project’s orientation towards the common good and the procedure and substance of concept-based tendering, with its special focus on eligible groups and coordination between the municipality and collaborative housing organizations. Finally, we discuss our findings regarding the role of municipalities and other state agents in enabling or hindering collaborative

housing oriented toward the common good. Moreover, we reflect upon the qualification of the case study as a prototype and its transferability, as well as its transformative potential.

2. Enhanced by Municipalities? From Collaborative Housing to Districts Oriented Towards the Common Good

2.1. Collaborative Housing

In the academic debate, new forms of collaborative housing are often framed as offering a “third way” between state-led, affordable housing, and other private or market-oriented developments (Tummers, 2016). In their study on non-profit housing initiatives’ interactions with the state, Mullins et al. (2018) observe a certain hybridity in the relationship of state-led collaborations with non-profit housing organizations. Their comparison underlines that housing initiatives’ forms and purposes depend on local context and welfare state regimes. Thereby, they carve out different degrees of co-production and partnership between civil society, the market, and the state. Czischke (2018, p. 59), moreover, sees a paradigmatic shift from state- and market-led housing regimes to new transformative forms of “responsibilisation.” In this vein, Tummers (2016, p. 2024) states that “collaborative housing initiatives fit in the societal trends of decentralization, increased self-reliability and demand for participation and custom-made solutions.” At the same time, state institutions constitute an important enabling factor and provide potential leverage for less well-established collaborative and cooperative housing projects, many of which are under financial strain (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022).

As a starting point, and to capture the multitude of forms, we follow Czischke’s definition of collaborative housing as “a wide array of initiatives, including co-housing, new types of residents’ co-operatives and other forms of collective self-organized housing” (Czischke, 2018, p. 56). In addition, a recent comparative study of collaborative housing (Griffith et al., 2024) in Europe emphasizes the following characteristics: First, provision and ownership ranging from user participation up to residents’ control (legal); second, common values and an emphasis on solidarity (ideational); and third, common management of the estate (organizational). According to De Vos and Spoormans (2022, p. 346), further aspects might apply, including, fourth, cooperative building and planning (processual); and, fifth, collective routines and facilities (social and economic). In several definitions of collaborative housing, we find the criterion that individual housing units cannot be bought or sold on the open market, thereby creating a commons and contributing to the decommodification of housing provision (Ferreri & Vidal, 2022). Balmer and Bernet’s (2015) comparison shows that the degree of decommodification and self-organization of housing varies, depending on the specific institutional arrangements that regulate the allocation of housing through public policies (e.g., subsidies) or property rights (see Section 2.2. for an overview of the possible instruments used by the state and municipalities in fostering collaborative housing).

Meanwhile, disentangling two labels frequently used in the German context sets the ground for our study. *Gemeinnützigkeit* (non-profit, charitable status) refers to an activity or entity that serves a public interest and is particularly relevant regarding organizations’ legal form and tax status. *Gemeinwohl* (common good), in turn, describes an entity or action that serves public interests but less in a technical than a relational sense, based on shared values and responsibilities (Gennies, 2021). For various reasons—such as legal, financial, and resource constraints—an orientation toward the common good does not always overlap with the status of a charitable organization (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, 2019). This can pose a challenge to both

community actors—primarily for financial reasons—and state-based actors, concerning channeling support towards collaborative housing groups.

2.2. Housing Transformations in Municipalities

The move away from market-based principles in housing reflects a broader and growing critique of profit-oriented economies (Fuller et al., 2016), often framed in terms of a “deep” or “social-ecological transformation” (Pichler, 2023). Cities are central arenas within which respective struggles and transformations play out (Schmid, 2023). Some of the most far-reaching examples of transformative practice have been observed at the municipal scale, for instance in the context of new municipalist platforms (Roth et al., 2023) in cities such as Barcelona (Spain), Zagreb (Croatia), or Naples (Italy), or the (tentative) experimentation with alternative economic models such as the Doughnut Economy (Khmara & Kronenberg, 2023; Thompson et al., 2024) in Grenoble (France) or Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Housing issues are front and center in these debates (Holm et al., 2022; Nelson & Schneider, 2019; Savini, 2022).

While embedded in relations of multi-level state structures, municipalities possess considerable scope of action to influence local collaborative housing organizations (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). Where municipalities own the land, the regulatory, procurement, and planning instruments at their disposal include the application of long-term leaseholds, pre-emption rights in the purchase of properties, and concept-based tendering. Particularly in the German context, the concept-based allocation of publicly owned plots has become a crucial instrument for steering collaborative housing development through urban planning (Szemző et al., 2019). Where land is privately owned, municipalities can require or incentivize collaborative housing, for example, through land use planning and urban development contracts with investors. In addition, public financial support is crucial for collaborative housing organizations (Lang & Stoeger, 2018). This can include public credit lines, loans, guarantees for access to private credit, and subsidies (Ferrerri & Vidal, 2022, p. 161). Besides these regulatory and financial instruments, local governments’ political strategies play a key role in navigating through collaborative and potentially conflictual processes (Ferrerri & Vidal, 2022). In the German context, successful municipal strategies, first, involve various stakeholders in negotiations and co-production; second, pursue a transparent land allocation strategy; third, publicly support neighborhood development (Szemző et al., 2019), as well as offering technical assistance and contributing to the co-creation of knowledge (Ferrerri & Vidal, 2022, p. 161).

3. Kleineschholz Case Study

3.1. Methodology

Throughout our research on the case study of Kleineschholz (starting in 2019 and continuing until the time of writing), we combined the three empirical methods of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. First, for the document analysis, we explored selected local housing policies and programs, public tenders and (online) descriptions of the project, minutes and decisions from the local parliament (city council), as well as newspaper articles. Second, we conducted 10 interviews with different stakeholders involved in the development project Kleineschholz. This includes four interviews with representatives from the municipal administration and politics who were involved in the substantive and legal design of the proposal for the concept-based tender. Furthermore, we conducted six interviews with

representatives from collaborative housing organizations who intend to apply for one of the properties and who underwent a preparation process to align their project with the requirements of the tender. Third, we adopted ethnographic research methods and conducted (participant) observations in several public and semi-public gatherings related to the development project. This includes public hearings, workshops addressing community-led housing projects, excursions led by members of the local administration, informal gatherings aimed at networking, and work sessions to build a permanent meeting space for collaborative housing actors (see Section 4).

3.2. Freiburg's Housing Policy

Our case study is situated in the German city of Freiburg, with 235,000 inhabitants in 2022. Between 2010 and 2015, the city experienced a population growth of 16,000 inhabitants, which was not foreseen by previous predictions for population development (Stadt Freiburg, 2012). This unexpected population growth, however, can be explained by several local specificities: Freiburg counts as a beneficiary of regionally uneven demographic change in Germany, due to its university being a center of attraction for students and a key employer, in combination with high quality of life and an academic green-alternative milieu (see also Haag & Köhler, 2012, p. 244).

Already in the 2010s, local politicians and the city government recognized the urgency of responding to the increasing housing shortage and rising rents. In 2013, the city council approved an urban housing program that included several measures, such as the promotion of housing developments in the inner city and the creation of a new district (Dietenbach); the promotion of affordable housing based on subsidies; and the allocation of public land based on concept-based tendering (Stadt Freiburg, 2013). When compared with housing policies in other German cities, these measures already indicate a post-neoliberal shift towards more regulation and social housing (Helbrecht & Weber-Newth, 2017; Metzger & Schipper, 2017).

3.3. Emerging Convergences Between Public and Collaborative Housing Provisioning

Collaborative housing organizations were already shaping Freiburg's housing landscape long before the municipality gradually opened up toward alternative forms of housing provision. In the 1980s, at a brownfield location in the city center, the early stages of what would later be recognized as the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* were taking shape (Hurlin, 2019). Over the years, and through long struggles, the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* managed to establish itself as an alliance of over 150 projects across various cities, characterized by a solidarity financing mechanism and a complex legal structure that prevents recommodification of projects (Hölzl, 2022). Whereas the relation between the municipality of Freiburg and many of its socially and environmentally minded housing projects—including, but also beyond, the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*—continued to be tension-filled, these groups grew to be increasingly important actors in urban developments. The internationally acclaimed development of the Vauban neighborhood (Freytag et al., 2014), for instance, was strongly driven by collaborative housing groups, but also accompanied by their numerous differences with the municipality.

A stronger formal recognition of collaborative housing organizations by the municipality followed within the last decade. Freiburg's urban housing program of 2013 explicitly mentions the expansion of "new urban forms" of community-oriented housing such as "Mietshäuser initiatives" (Stadt Freiburg, 2013 p. 18; translated by authors). Concept-based tendering was introduced the same year for the development project

Gutleutmatten, where three projects of the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* were realized, providing housing for over 130 people at below 7 €/m² (as of 2021)—which is considerably below the local average monthly rent of over 13 €/m². Kleineschholz’s comprehensive orientation toward the common good can be seen as a logical next step of this evolution—propelled by Martin Horn’s election as mayor in 2018. The latter established two new administrative units and an exchange format to intensify interdepartmental efforts towards affordable housing: the Department for Affordable Housing as a staff unit of the Mayor and the Housing Steering Group (Stadt Freiburg, 2020). In 2020, the administration issued—and the city council adopted—the *Affordable Housing 2030* strategy. It is within this broader context of an active real estate policy of the city of Freiburg that the district development project Kleineschholz is set and has to be understood.

4. Orientation Towards the Common Good Through Concept-Based Tendering

The Kleineschholz development is located in the Stühlinger district in a central area of Freiburg. Approximately 500 residential units are to be built on a 77,500 m² site (Stadt Freiburg, 2022). The planning process began in 2010 with a citizen dialogue on guidelines for the area’s development. In 2016, allotment gardeners—previously the primary users of the area—were informed about the plans for housing construction and alternative allotments. A series of participation and information events were held throughout 2017 and continued in parallel to the competition for a development plan in 2018 and early 2019. The framework plan was adjusted based on the design competition and adopted in 2020 and 2021, respectively. In 2020, Mayor Martin Horn, along with the administration and the city council, endorsed the orientation towards the common good as the central feature of the project (Stadt Freiburg, 2020). In the same year, the Kleineschholz Project Group was set up as the city administration’s key task force to lead the planning process. In October 2021, the project was classified as an urban development measure (§ 165 of the German Building Code). The draft land use plan was opened for public consultation in 2022 and adopted by the city council in December 2023. At the same time, the Council approved the principles for the marketing and allocation of building plots. Both key planning instruments—the land use plan (see Figure 1 and the detailed development plan with local building regulations in its annex; Stadt Freiburg, 2023b) and the allocation concept—detail several elements of the neighborhood’s orientation towards the common good, which will be presented in greater detail below. Marketing of the properties is scheduled for fall 2024, with the first development measures having begun in December 2023, and construction of the first residential buildings beginning in 2025. Completion of the new neighborhood is scheduled for 2033.

To effectively synthesize and present the key procedural (Table 1) and substantive (Table 2) elements of the property allocation oriented towards the common good in Kleineschholz, we use two tables. Table 1 details the steps of the *process* of property allocation. The selection process diverges from previous approaches of the municipality, such as in the district Gutleutmatten, where projects were evaluated based on a list of previously fixed criteria (*Punktevergabe*). This foremost quantitative approach led to less diverse and less innovative approaches, as collaborative housing organizations wrote their proposals to match the criteria. For Kleineschholz, a qualitative evaluation of projects was chosen, allowing the city administration to be more flexible in steering the process to achieve an overall mix in the neighborhood. As stated in an interview with the administration:

The concept allocation will be an open concept allocation, meaning we will hardly make any qualitative specifications. Instead, we will rely on the ideas of the projects, like a think tank, allowing them to



Figure 1. Urban development and open space framework plan. Source: Stadt Freiburg (2023b).

create synergies and enabling us to benefit significantly more from their creativity than we have in other development areas so far. This is a huge opportunity for Kleineschholz, because we really expect to see good, innovative socio-ecological ideas and implementations. If we were to use a point system as an alternative, it would be like saying, “If you put a fir tree on the roof, you get 10 points,” then everyone would just put a fir tree there instead of thinking about what else could be nicely done on the roof. (Interview 1 with administration)

Furthermore, the Kleineschholz planning process entails significant stakeholder engagement, including regular meetings between the Kleineschholz Project Group and representatives of selected housing organizations, as well as a comparatively high responsiveness of the allocation concept and land use plan to challenges and opportunities raised by those groups.

Table 2 depicts the substantive elements of the orientation towards the common good in the allocation concept and the land use plan, clustered around different themes. Compared to prior initiatives, interviewees emphasized the prominent role of common good principles, the low-threshold application requirements at the first stage, and the open concept awarding as distinctive elements.

Table 1. The property allocation process in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Phases and key actors	Procedural steps and specific features	Opportunities and challenges
Pre-tender process 2020–2023 PA, CHO, CC, and P	Regular meetings of the Kleineschholz Project Group and representatives of selected CHOs; Workshop series for professionalization of CHOs; Opening of a meeting space (<i>Pavilion for All</i>) for community groups located at the site of Kleineschholz	Time—and resource—intense, facilitated in-house, supported by two additional full-time positions; High degree of responsiveness in the public tender; Early involvement and participation of CHOs
Decision on the tendering process 12/2023 PA and CC	Two-step concept-based tendering; Low access requirements; High degree of flexibility in terms of content	Low-threshold access to the application procedure for CHOs; Promotes innovative, creative, and diverse concepts and profitability
Tender 2023–2024 PA, CHO, and CC	Allocation concept frames tender design; Public tender (incl. information event)	High transparency for CHOs; Including CHO feedback during the participation process
Selection process 2024–2025 PA, CHO, and CC	Interviews with applying projects' (CHO) representatives; Qualitative assessment regarding guidelines (no fixed criteria); Selected projects can reserve properties for up to twelve months	Flexibility; Potential for innovations arising from the openness of the process
From reservation to full proposal 2025 PA and CHO	Projects need to provide documents to receive property: design planning, measurement, building application, proof of financing, ground lease contract	Issues could emerge at later stage of the process; Unknown flexibility by potential successor groups

Notes: Own compilation based on Stadt Freiburg (2023a) and interviews with representatives of Freiburg's municipal administration; key actors are abbreviated as follows: public administration (PA), collaborative housing organizations (CHO), city council (CC), public (P).

Table 2. Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Common good	Neighborhood development with stakeholders oriented towards the common good, tenant-orientation, and long-term keeping of properties; Definition of "orientation towards the common good" via a catalogue of criteria bound to legal status and property use (see details below); No realization of projects that entail individual ownership, including building groups	Land policy objectives: counteract land speculation and secure long-term access to properties; Marketing and realization risk due to CHOs' limited financial resources

Table 2. (Cont.) Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Design targets	<p>Prioritizing the creation of affordable, rent-controlled housing;</p> <p>Eco-friendly design, pedestrian accessibility, cost-efficient use of living space;</p> <p>Sharing communal green and open spaces;</p> <p>Including wide range of user groups: from small to large family or cluster apartments, barrier-free apartments</p>	<p>Marketing and realization risk due to high standards;</p> <p>Low-threshold and digital ecological assessment tool available to applicants free of charge</p>
Actors oriented towards the common good	<p>Requirements for the legal status of the project (companies);</p> <p>Requirements for the use of the property;</p> <p>Public tender allows for approximately 16 projects</p>	<p>Flexibility of legal status of building entity;</p> <p>Public developers—Freiburger Stadtbau GmbH (municipal housing cooperation) and <i>Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben</i> (BImA, former owner of the land)—do not participate in the tender</p>
Low-threshold application requirements at first stage	<p>Project's description with a detailed concept (e.g., use, occupation structure, special features), supported by sketches, financing, residential mix, project's minimum sizes, the naming of desired plot, and one alternative plot;</p> <p>Sustainability assessment shall be submitted with the application</p>	<p>No detailed planning is requested, to keep the applicants' costs as low as possible</p>
Open concept awarding	<p>Descriptive holistic approach for evaluating and selecting submitted concepts based on criteria:</p> <p>Contribution to the neighborhood and/or urban area (mission statement Kleineschholz as a guideline);</p> <p>Quality of the project idea including financial feasibility;</p> <p>Reliable realization including the construction project's structure and division of tasks</p>	<p>CHOs can develop and contribute their own ideas for the neighborhood;</p> <p>Public actors do not predetermine concepts</p>
Leasehold requirement adjusted through limited property sale	<p>Leasehold model as a priority;</p> <p>Alternative property purchase, including the city's right of disposal (price-limited right of first refusal or repurchase by the city);</p> <p>Obligations to be contractually agreed and secured <i>in rem</i> in the land register</p>	<p>Lower mortgage lending capacity for leaseholds (land component not included in value calculation);</p> <p>Adjustments due to restricted project financing, especially in times of high construction and financing costs</p>
Subsidized rental housing	<p>At least 50% of the created residential floor space as subsidized rental apartments;</p> <p>Criteria of the current state housing subsidy program apply, rent control with a standard commitment period of 30 years, 33% discount on the local comparative rent</p>	<p>Ensures a high share of subsidized rental housing;</p> <p>Marketing and realization risk</p>

Table 2. (Cont.) Substantive elements in the allocation concept in the Kleineschholz neighborhood development.

Theme	Allocation concept and land use plan	Opportunities and challenges
Financial support	<p>Time-limited grant from the BlmA of over €6 million for subsidized housing construction measures;</p> <p>Municipal subsidy of over €6 million to reduce privately financed rents in the medium term;</p> <p>Further municipal funding opportunities</p>	<p>Buffers high interest rates and construction costs and deterioration of state and federal housing subsidies;</p> <p>Remains challenging for small projects</p>
Energy concept	<p>Heat supply via district heating; tender won by municipal utility company, heat supply contract concluded in December 2022; compulsory connection to and use of the grid;</p> <p>35% of the building's floor area is specified as a photovoltaic module area; the roof area of approx. 1,000 m² can optionally be used by Badenova (energy company) for a photovoltaic system;</p> <p>Minimum of energy efficiency house standard 55 with heat recovery</p>	<p>Early decision on heat supply with limited influence of CHOs;</p> <p>Limits other options for heat supply efficiency house standard 55 corresponds to current German law. A more ambitious standard (EH 40) was discussed but dismissed due to financial constraints</p>

Operating under the guiding principle of *Gemeinwohl*—the common good—instead of terms defined with more legal clarity avoids exclusions based on legal status. However, it also challenges the municipality to specify who is eligible for the tendering process. Applicants have to fall within one of four specified groups to participate in the selection:

1. Companies with models of tenant participation in the asset value, such as cooperative shares (*Mietshäuser Syndikat*, cooperatives, limited partnership);
2. Companies with a state, municipal, or church mandate to provide services of general interest for residential use;
3. Companies whose purpose includes the promotion of social, ecological, cultural, or comparable socially oriented projects (reference projects are required);
4. Companies providing housing for their own employees, drawn from professions crucial for the functioning of the state or social system (e.g., emergency services, nursing staff, educators, and care services).

Moreover, the projects are required to use the property as described in their awarded concept. This includes no division into partial ownership; the obligation to maintain the buildings for a period of at least 30 years; the agreement to a repurchase right in favor of the city; and resale only with the consent of the city, to purchasers who fulfill the requirements of the foreseen focus on the common good and assume all obligations. In addition, the projects sign an agreement on tenant protection (e.g., no possibility of termination due to personal use, generally no luxury refurbishments, and generally no conversion of residential to commercial space). While these criteria leave leeway for different organizations, the tendering process is geared towards the first listed group: collaborative housing groups. The administrative task force for the Kleineschholz development stated that:

With this approach [concept-based tendering], we open up to groups that do not see real estate as an investment good but as a consumer good. This gives us the opportunity to move further away from profitability....Instead of focusing on profitability, they can ask, “What good can we do for the community?” This concept allows us to prioritize these aspects higher than, for example, simply meeting minimum standards. (Interview 4 with administration)

Yet, while collaborative housing groups are the main addressee of concept-based tendering, administrative actors see a challenge in (some) actors’ inexperience and “degree of great idealism,” alongside issues of financing—requiring additional support (Interview 4 with administration). To increase professionalism and lend support to housing organizations, the city has co-initiated and financed a workshop series in close collaboration with collaborative housing organizations. This series builds on a long-standing exchange between the municipality and housing actors oriented towards the common good. Aside from meetings with “traditional housing cooperatives,” this includes bimonthly meetings with a selected group of organizations, such as the *Mietshäuser Syndikat*, to determine what they “need in order to build with us” and whether the municipality is “on the right track” with setting conducive framework conditions (Interview 4 with administration). Overall, these selected housing organizations had continuous opportunities to offer suggestions and provide feedback on the planning process of Kleineschholz. However, collaborative housing initiatives expressed criticisms in interviews that some elements were decided already quite early in the process, with little influence for housing organizations. This is the case, for instance, with the energy concept, which is based on centralized provisioning instead of decentralized solutions (such as the mandatory connection of residents to the district heating system, see Table 2). Collaborative housing groups also pointed out that the development plan regulated potential buildings in too much detail. In an interview, a collaborative housing group pointed out that:

What I observe is that, on the one hand, they [the municipal administration and politicians] are open and say, “Oh yes, this is all innovative and great and social and ecological,” but on the other hand, they are very restrictive in their specifications. This creates a bit of a contradiction. For example, the development plan is formulated in such detail that there is very little room left to think or do things differently. (Interview 6 with collaborative housing group)

Although the municipality and collaborative housing groups shared the vision of an open and creative process, perceptions of what that entails diverged. Yet, the aforementioned exchange format allowed mediation between these different positions and resulted in the flexibilization of some specifications (e.g., the requirements for façade greening). While the municipality’s collaborative orientation has been appreciated by most initiatives, it also has limits when it comes to addressing the challenges for collaborative housing organizations. Aside from more specific framework conditions that can only be partially mediated by the municipality—for instance, prescribed ratios for parking—high building costs and increasing interest rates, coupled with the limited access to state and federal programs and subsidies, severely strain the initiatives’ margin of maneuver. The unknown consequences of these developments unsettle both community and municipal actors. In response, the original plan to allocate municipal land for residential use exclusively under heritable building rights (leasehold) had to be adjusted. Shortly before the publication of the tender, the municipality re-introduced the option of land purchases (with a repurchase option for the municipality after 99 years). This was a reaction to the inadequate consideration of leasehold models—as originally foreseen in Kleineschholz—in the state housing subsidy program. Furthermore, the municipality mobilizes €6 million to support projects that provide price-restricted housing.

Our interviews with actors from housing initiatives underline that substantial experience within and close connections among local housing organizations contribute to navigating these challenging framework conditions. While financing remains the main difficulty for collaborative housing organizations, especially those without previous projects as collateral, Freiburg's established housing community enables mutual learning and support. The long-standing connections between key actors and groups (the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* and other established cooperatives), however, also come with a certain exclusivity. To counter this, the *Pavillon für Alle* (Pavilion for All)—a meeting space for community groups located at the site of Kleineschholz—was initiated and built by the local housing cooperative *Dachgenossenschaft* (which translates to “umbrella cooperative,” referring to the primary purpose of the cooperative as providing an organizational infrastructure to collaborative housing groups, thus supporting their development). While established groups already had platforms for exchanges and meeting spaces, the Pavilion lowers the barrier for new actors to join and learn, also to participate in arrangements amongst housing organizations to lower the competition, for instance regarding what plots to apply for. Although constituting a central resource for (some) collaborative housing groups—for facilitation, learning, coordination, and integration—the Pavilion was almost exclusively realized by civil society actors. The fact that the city of Freiburg did not offer any financial support (aside from temporarily providing a space on site) and that miscommunications between different departments of municipal administration considerably complicated the process, led some actors to question the sincerity of the city's ambitions. Despite the remarkable engagement between the municipality and collaborative housing groups—evident, for instance, from the frequent presence of city representatives at public events in the Pavilion—a certain caution remains on both sides, not least because of decades of more contentious relations.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Taken on its own, Kleineschholz marks a sharp turn away from the profit-oriented housing that characterized Freiburg's development projects in the decades before 2010 and still marks the prevalent form of housing politics in Germany and internationally (Aalbers, 2017; Lima, 2021). While the development of an entire district by collaborative housing groups seems noteworthy for its novelty, it also raises a number of questions regarding process and substance. Above, we have outlined the distinctive features of the concept-based tendering that constitutes the central fulcrum in the development project of Kleineschholz. Based on our findings, this concluding section first reflects on key enabling and hindering factors in using concept-based tendering to develop Kleineschholz as “100% oriented towards the common good,” as claimed by Mayor Martin Horn. Second, we discuss the relevance of the Kleineschholz case for future developments in Freiburg and beyond.

In contrast to most studies on collaborative housing, we foreground the interplay between municipal institutions and community groups. Our findings underline the relevance, not only of housing initiatives' organizational capacities (Hölzl, 2022, p. 6) but also of local governments' engagement (Ferrerri & Vidal, 2022), through urban planning instruments and housing policies which can substantially contribute to enabling collaborative housing developments. It is crucial to emphasize that public ownership of land is a fundamental requirement for using concept-based tendering. Given the significance of public land ownership for this approach—central to our case study's focus on housing for the common good—municipalities looking to advance such developments should avoid privatizing public land. Instead, they should explore strategies for remunicipalization, including the possibility of repurchasing private land.

Yet, whether or not collaborative housing is effectively supported by concept-based tendering highly depends on the tender design and further contextual conditions. In the case of Kleineschholz, the city of Freiburg offers substantial support to collaborative housing organizations, by introducing favorable regulations, subsidies, and accompanying a cooperative, publicly supported participatory process.

Identifying the municipality as a key driver, however, would also fall short of the complexity of Kleineschholz. Our analysis shows that the project can only be understood through past and present interactions of city officials and collaborative housing groups. Below the surface of targeted institutional support are long-term struggles and a gradual rapprochement between housing groups and the municipality. For Kleineschholz, specifically, this manifests in a continuous exchange format which allowed municipal actors to consider the needs of collaborative housing groups and adapt the concept-based tendering accordingly—with some friction points remaining for various financial, legal, and cultural reasons. In addition to learning about the general needs of collaborative housing groups, these dialogues helped the municipality to react appropriately to rapidly changing framework conditions (e.g., the steep rise in interest rates).

The importance of the dialogue between the municipality and collaborative housing groups is further substantiated by our finding that the legal framework *as such* does not constitute a major barrier to housing development with a focus on the common good. Rather, as the case study highlights, the creative use of legal instruments can help to ensure high standards concerning the common good. Although concept-based tendering must comply with the requirements of public procurement and competition law, these provide a range of opportunities to introduce common good principles (cf. Lausen & Pustal, 2022; Däuper & Braun, 2022). The land use plan, leasehold, and property purchase agreements, as well as securities *in rem*, are used to manifest the orientation towards the common good in a legally binding manner. According to our insights, the key challenges to realizing the Kleineschholz project are the current financial constraints, especially in times of high construction costs and interest rates. To mitigate these factors of a potential failure of the entire development, the local administration, in close interaction with housing organizations, adjusted the tender conditions to respond to severe funding constraints.

However, the cooperation with and support from the city are not perceived as entirely positive by collaborative housing groups. The municipality's active and involved role in steering the process serves an important function in realizing such an ambitious project. Nevertheless, some priorities are misaligned with the actual needs of collaborative housing groups. This relates in particular to a number of regulations and pivotal decisions (e.g., on the energy concept) that narrow the scope for action of housing groups. This indicates, first, that the municipality has to carefully navigate between setting conducive framework conditions and leaving enough flexibility in planning for collaborative housing initiatives. Second, despite remarkably close coordination between municipality and housing groups, there is further potential for mutual learning. While the municipality's leadership is crucial, it is thus equally important to recognize the vibrant and fairly professionalized collaborative housing community as an essential element. An exemplary instance of this engagement is the Pavilion for All, a physical meeting space that served as a "grassrooting vector" (Hölzl, 2022, p. 9) for fostering local networks and knowledge exchange among initiatives.

In the academic debate, collaborative housing is regularly framed as a model for wider housing provision that can be upscaled to contribute to the development of larger neighborhoods (Tummers, 2016). In this sense, for some, Kleineschholz serves as a testing ground and blueprint that might be transferred to the

development of the tenfold larger greenfield urban development project, Dietenbach. At the same time, many interviewees from both local administration and housing organizations are skeptical that even a city such as Freiburg, with its strong tradition in collaborative housing, has enough professional initiatives to successfully manage a large-scale urban housing project. Instead, perspectives prevail that Kleineschholz, with its 500 housing units, remains “the right size at the right location” (Interview 1 with administration). Our contextualized case study underlines that Kleineschholz must be seen as an experimental lighthouse project rather than the new normal.

For the municipal actors, Kleineschholz nevertheless offers a learning process, stimulated by experimentation, which “enables physical transformation by changing organizational practices that commonly prevent new solutions being adopted at scale” (Evans et al., 2021, p. 177). While some aspects and lessons from Kleineschholz—such as the close collaboration between municipal administration and collaborative housing organizations, especially in and around the community-organized meeting space (Pavilion for All)—are expected to be applicable in Dietenbach, the principle of the common good will not be the guiding framework for this large-scale development. In Dietenbach, private individuals and for-profit developers will play a central role. Moreover, the transferability of the Kleineschholz approach to publicly enabled, collaborative housing development is limited due to its precondition of public land ownership, high demands regarding time, personnel, and financial investments on the part of both the municipality and collaborative housing organizations.

Just as Freiburg can derive learning opportunities from the Kleineschholz case, important insights for socio-ecological transformations can also be drawn more broadly. In particular, our case study of Kleineschholz speaks to recent debates around transformative planning practices in which housing is a central issue (e.g., Savini, 2022, 2024). For a critical assessment, it is helpful to turn to Eckersley’s (2021) notion of critical problem-solving. With this concept, Eckersley seeks to connect the more radical and theoretical debates on transformation with a more pragmatic and practice-oriented outlook of transition studies by locating transformative ambitions in the identification of “the next best transition steps with the greatest transformative potential” (Eckersley, 2021, p. 12). Kleineschholz, indeed, embodies principles that can serve as general, ambitious orientations for other urban developments—such as the use of leasehold models and high rates of subsidized and collaborative housing. And yet, despite Kleineschholz’s exceptional character serving as inspiration and learning ground, it is, to some extent, precisely that: exceptional. Our research finds that under the current city government, Kleineschholz might offer some opportunities for learning processes contributing to establishing wider social and ecological transformative practices. When assessing the project’s transformative potential, however, two limitations remain: First, the municipality, including actors central to realizing concept-based tendering, does not “unite around an alternative hegemonic project” (Eckersley, 2021, p. 10) but occupies various positions vis-à-vis non-profit housing development. Second, building new housing developments—no matter how just and sustainable—evades redistributive conflicts by enlarging that which is to be distributed. In light of Freiburg’s growing population, deep social-ecological transformations would require the re-organization of per-capita living space—a challenge much more difficult than the realization of a housing project oriented towards the common good.

Overall, local decision-makers showed a high degree of political determination to enable and promote collaborative housing organizations as a new approach to urban development. In that sense, “the new urban, mixed-use neighborhood Kleineschholz...set[s] engaged social, architectural, and ecological benchmarks

through an ambitious orientation towards the common good” labelled as a “Freiburg model” (Stadt Freiburg, 2022, p. 13; translated by the authors). It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the approach developed for the collaborative housing development of Kleineschholz possesses the qualities of a model that is transferrable to other contexts, or whether this housing development with a focus on the common good remains bound to unique local conditions, most importantly a wealthy, resourceful, and academic-alternative oriented milieu.

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Conflict of Interests

Benedikt Schmid is a member of the Dachgenossenschaft Wohnen für Alle eG. Any potential conflicts of interest arising from this affiliation were carefully considered and addressed to uphold rigorous scientific standards.

Data Availability

Detailed and up-to-date data on the Kleineschholz development project are available on the project website, administered by the City of Freiburg (<https://www.freiburg.de/pb/,Lde/1417623.html>). All official documents related to public sessions of the city council on Kleineschholz can be found at <https://ris.freiburg.de>.

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