

Living together in the Gemeindebau in Vienna: On Tensions, Conflicts, Fears and Hopes

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Executive summary

This report deals with conflicts at the local action research sites of the ALTERNATIVE project in **Vienna** – the intercultural settings of neighbourhoods in social housing estates (Gemeindebau).

We approach this task by first contextualizing broader social developments impacting this research field. The first part, the introduction to this report, is followed in the second part by a discussion of the history and the political importance of the **Gemeindebau**. The third part deals with the phenomenon of immigration in Austria from a socio-historical perspective. The fourth part describes the developments on the field of mediation in Austria. In part five, we offer the reader a closer look on the research field and introduce our local partner organisations, ‘wohnpartner’ and ‘Bassena am Schöpfwerk’, and their community-building activities in social housing estates.

Part six constructs a link of these contexts to empirical realities and introduces life in social housing estates from residents’ perspectives. Through **‘voices of residents’** we look further into social life there as it is remembered and as it is perceived today. We hear of social relations as important resources to tackle the challenges of daily life and as lines of tensions or conflicts. This

representation is grouped around chosen themes, which throw specific – and hopefully interesting – spotlights at the data we gathered through empirical research in the second project year.

In the section **‘The world we have lost’** we offer a more differentiated perception of present-day experiences of living together by comparing them with a bygone past. In the section *‘The fear of the other’* we expand on the theme of fears on “both sides”, that of the migrants and the ‘Old-Viennese’. We try to come closer to the social dynamics that lie behind those fears, to link them to the wider societal developments that have taken place and that we have described in part two and three of the report. Thus we look at how people are being confronted with a new politics of diversity. This is set against the background of what the Gemeindebau represented in former times, the changes that have occurred and – not least – the politics of right-wing parties and the attraction they hold for large segments of people living in Vienna.



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In the following two subsections we have recounted examples taken from **group discussions** that illustrate the intricacies, contradictions and potentials of *'experiences of multiple belongings'* and of *'experiences of (relative) citizenship: belonging but different(ly)'*.

Both subsections relate to **interviews with migrants** living in Austria and discuss their accounts in relation to the concepts of identity and citizenship. We argue that the exclusive logic inherent to national identity makes it difficult for transnational migrants to reconcile the emotional sense of 'feeling home in both' countries on a cognitive level. Thus our interview partners see themselves confronted with the either-or question of who they 'really' are, while experiencing how their sense of belonging to the Austrian society is constantly

questioned by others, even if they possess national citizenship.

In the concluding part, we try to come up with a first theoretical realignment of empirical findings with some theoretical contents we presented in our report on *Activating civil society*. Hence we expand on our critical reflections concerning the meaning and practice of **'active participation'** on the one hand and discuss local expressions of 'othering' and 'politics of diversity' on the other. Eventually, we raise crucial questions to be addressed through future research on the philosophical concept of recognition and its practical relevance for the fields of interest in this report.

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