

PART II

*Chapter 10*

**Improving Quality of Life  
in Distressed Urban Areas in Bremen,  
Germany**

by

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## Introduction

Many German cities have experienced spatial segregation and the decline of some neighbourhoods. The problems of distressed urban areas are multi-dimensional and the outcome of complex interactions between economic, social and spatial factors. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to be characterised by high unemployment rates, a poor physical environment, social and economic exclusion, low educational levels, high crime rates, lack of infrastructures and service delivery and a general sense of despair among residents. The large numbers of migrants who tend to come to these distressed urban neighbourhoods place additional stress on these neighbourhoods. In the past, most regeneration efforts were focussed on improving the physical space. Recently, initiatives have focused on improving the social infrastructure of distressed neighbourhoods. Whilst some initiatives use a top-down approach, there is increasingly a shift towards explicitly involving local residents in improving their neighbourhood. Participation on the local level can empower people and give a sense of ownership and control. However, people with a low socio-economic background, young people or migrants may be shy to articulate their views or lack the rhetorical skills to express their opinions in public fora and their opinions and may not be taken seriously. In addition, state representatives may not be comfortable to relay power and (binding) decision making to “the people”.

## WiN – Wohnen in Nachbarschaften (Living in Neighbourhoods) and Soziale Stadt (Districts with Special Development Needs – Socially Integrated Cities)

The communal project WiN – Living in Neighbourhoods was launched on 8 December 1998 by the city state of Bremen in Northern Germany to improve ten deprived neighbourhoods. It is horizontally organised involving all relevant city and Land departments, and over 800 projects have been realised so far. WiN goals are threefold:

1. To improve the living conditions in distressed urban areas.
2. To develop local engagement of citizens.
3. To encourage co-operation between local actors. (The project gives room to local actors to determine the exact content to ensure that it fits local realities.)

“Soziale Stadt” (Districts With Special Development Needs – Socially Integrative City), a joint federal and Länder programme to foster participation and co-operation, signifies a new integrative political approach to urban district development. The programme is managed under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS), represented by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR), who commissioned the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Defy) to support the programme for the initial implementation phase (1999-2003). A nationwide network was set up, providing onsite programme support in 16 Socially Integrative City pilot districts (among them Bremen) and designing a programme evaluation system. The thematic focus covers all relevant topics ranging from strategic fields of activities, such as neighbourhood management to activation and participation. Substantive activity areas include:

employment; qualifications and training; accumulation of neighbourhood assets; social activities and social infrastructure; schools and education; health promotion; transport and the environment; urban district culture; sports and recreation; integration of diverse social and ethnic groups; housing market and housing industry; living environment and public space; image improvement and public relations; and community living in the districts.

The high degree of thematic, strategic and location overlap between WiN and Soziale Stadt led the authorities in Bremen to link both programmes to create synergy effects. Combining the resources and commitment of two programmes may be one of the factors why Tenever, a distressed neighbourhood in Bremen, has implemented more projects than any of the other ten pilot neighbourhoods.

Tenever is one of the ten deprived neighbourhoods that were selected to participate in WiN – Soziale Stadt. Tenever is a peripheral neighbourhood built on a greenfield site on the eastern outskirts of Bremen, a city state\* in Northern Germany. The high-rise buildings were constructed in the early 1970s and are home to about 6 500 people in 2 635 flats. About 82% of residents are foreigners (including ethnic Germans), originating from 88 countries. The population is characterised as being particularly young. Approximately 41% of Tenever residents receive unemployment benefits. Tenever, which is about 13 kilometres away from the city centre, is not served by an underground or overground train but relies instead on a bus service which takes about 30 minutes to the city centre.

The high fluctuation of residents is an obstacle to achieving sustained participation in Tenever. Residents with a degree of choice leave for other neighbourhoods after an average flat occupancy rate of nine years. This is a short period considering that the average flat occupancy rate in the ten distressed WiN areas is nearly twice as large, 17 years. A constant need to integrate recent immigrants puts additional pressure on the neighbourhood. Between 2004 and 2008, the high-rise buildings have been renovated and unoccupied buildings demolished. The anticipated rent increase, as well as moving residents of buildings that will be demolished to other flats, has caused concern among residents.

## Programme implementation

### 1. Setting the stage

Inclusion in the decision-making process is vital; it creates a sense of ownership and pride, and subsequently makes projects more sustainable. This is particularly important considering that WiN – Soziale Stadt programme funds will eventually expire. Improvements in the social sphere cannot be made from the outside but require support from within. Local participation can also integrate residents who feel far away from decision-making centres. A salaried project manager with a background in social work for each pilot neighbourhood is the first contact point for residents and any group who wishes to run a project in Tenever. The district manager organises and moderates the project group meeting, brings different actors together, and is responsible for initiating and managing projects, as well as for setting priorities in the project group. Tenever also has a neighbourhood office.

For its decision making, the programme relies on the district group which meets every five weeks. Working groups to develop specific projects (for example to enlarge the youth

\* The city state Bremen, together with Bremevenhaven, is one of 16 Bundesländer that form the Federal Republic of Germany.

Table 10.1. **WiN and Soziale Stadt projects in Tenever: Key characteristics**

Costs	Tenever receives about EUR 160 000 per year from WiN and a budget of EUR 150 000 (2005), EUR 330 000 (2006) and EUR 135 000 (2007) per year from “Soziale Stadt” (Districts With Special Development Needs – Socially Integrative City). The total budget per year varies accordingly. In 2008, Tenever received EUR 160 000 from WiN and EUR 140 000 from Social Stadt and EUR 80 000 from LOS.
Risks	<p>A number of challenges were anticipated and encountered in the implementation of WiN – Soziale Stadt in Tenever.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustaining citizens’ participation over long periods of time can be challenging. The evaluation in 2004 has shown that citizens are more likely to get involved if the projects were time-bound and on a specific issue that concerns them directly.</li> <li>• In the district group, the consensus principle is used to reach a decision. The consensus principle, unlike the majority principle, can be a lengthy process. It risks that the results attained are the lowest common denominator, which may create a sense of dissatisfaction among decision makers and participants. However, since participants are forced to openly communicate in order to find a viable solution, then more innovative decisions may be reached.</li> <li>• There is a risk that the participatory process in Tenever is not sufficiently democratic, as the district group members are not democratically elected to represent their neighbourhood. Transparency in the decision-making process is sometimes lacking, according to some project leaders. Local projects implemented in Tenever were very often initiated by the professional project leaders and not by local residents. A clear strategic orientation is sometimes missing and there is a lack of objective criteria to assess and evaluate projects. However, citizens play an active and decisive role when it comes to evaluating and approving projects. In fact, the high competency in evaluating and assessing new projects by residents contributes to deeper local ownership of the projects.</li> </ul>
Benefits	<p>WiN – Soziale Stadt contributed to cohesion in Tenever in three ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, it highlighted the situation in Tenever. There is a perception that the participation of residents in neighbourhood management added value for city authorities in terms of understanding the points of view and specific needs of local residents.</li> <li>• Second, actively participating in the district group meeting with all actors, including city and Land administrators, empowered residents.</li> <li>• Finally, it improved overall quality of life in Tenever as suggested by the evaluation report. The principle strength of the district group is its high competency in evaluating and approving projects which aim to improve the overall quality of Tenever.</li> </ul>
Inclusion	The project puts local residents at the core of decision making, as all projects have to be approved by the district group which is open to all residents and meets once a fortnight in Tenever. The composition of the district group tends to change each time, but women tend to be somewhat overrepresented and migrants underrepresented.
Evaluation	WiN and Soziale Stadt in the ten neighbourhoods were evaluated in 2004 by two external institutions. The evaluation approach was holistic and included reviewing the programmes, their impacts and assessing to what degree previously determined goals were reached as well as appraising the design, governance and prospect. Both programmes contributed to significantly improving the physical and social situation. The evaluation also emphasised that many problems that exist in distressed urban neighbourhoods, such as unemployment, are problems that go beyond what a relatively small urban regeneration programme can do and require changes in society at large. The evaluation identified the merging of two urban regeneration programmes – WiN and Soziale Stadt – as having resulted in more efficient financial and human resources management. The results of the evaluation are publicly available.

centre into a veritable centre for children, youth and adults) meet on an *ad hoc* basis. Every meeting is organised around five points. i) questions and problems; ii) report of actions taken since the last meeting; iii) updated information regarding the renovation of Tenever; iv) updates regarding WiN – Soziale Stadt projects and funding; and v) any other business. In addition, the district group also chooses a political focus theme, or example “Pisa and Schools in Tenever”. The group is a forum for exchanging information and to discuss problems directly with responsible officials. The first two points in particular paint a long-term picture of residents’ evolving priorities and worries which should be reflected in the various projects. The project group has become one of the pillars of community life with 40 to 80 people participating in each meeting. Approved projects get the “WiN Seal of Approval”, a prerequisite before a project can be considered by the administration and implemented. The district group can have a huge beneficial impact on Tenever’s residents. For example, the district group negotiated with a well-known low-price supermarket to open a branch in Tenever. District group meetings typically last three hours. The district group’s work includes the following areas:

- Neighbourhood management and lobbying.
- Facilitating local citizens self-help and organisation.

- Developing and implementing Tenever's rehabilitation.
- Advisory service to all interested parties.
- Implementing WiN.
- Liaising with the authorities, city council and building society.
- Networking.
- Collaboration and co-ordination mechanisms.
- Public relations.
- Initiating and steering of all activities and plans related to Tenever and representing Tenever during official events.

Each year in autumn the annual WiN – Soziale Stadt workshop is organised by the district manager. During the workshop, stock-taking takes place to evaluate which projects worked well and how to improve projects and the process. Based on the original WiN and Soziale Stadt frameworks, a list of objectives for the coming year is drawn up by the district managers and all interested parties can log their new project proposals. The district manager spends the next two months discussing each project with the different actors to get a better picture of which projects have the best chance of being realised and to concentrate interests and resources. The revised list of projects is then presented and discussed in the next district group meeting until a consensus is reached; a final list of projects with a budget is adopted. It can happen that a project is rejected at a later stage. Projects can also be proposed later during the year, permitted that there are still funds left.

## **2. Sustaining participation**

Prior to establishing WiN – Soziale Stadt, an urban amendment project was initiated in the 1980s under the auspices of the Senator für Umwelt, Bau, Verkehr und Europa to improve the physical side of distressed neighbourhoods, including Tenever. As part of this project, a district group was established in 1989 so that residents were already familiar with the local participative process when WiN – Soziale Stadt was implemented. The same district manager has headed Tenever's district group since its establishment. Having the same district manager for 19 years gives a high degree of continuity, institutional memory, a wealth of experience and solid working relationships with all actors; this has certainly contributed to the success of local participation in Tenever. Once a year, a ceremony to appreciate and thank particular engaged local residents is staged in Tenever and the "golden skyscraper" is awarded to worthy individuals and groups.

## **3. Information dissemination**

Information is distributed through various channels thereby maximising its outreach potential. Information about the work and decisions taking by the district group is made available online through a regularly updated website. The website is complemented by posters, flyers, blackboards in the neighbourhood, and an information stall in the local shopping centre. Minutes of the meetings are also mailed to interested citizens upon request. Tenever's own TV show on a public television channel – Quak Kanal – is aired once a month to inform local residents about what is going on in their neighbourhood. The evaluation showed that WiN – Soziale Stadt is well known among residents.

In all, the district group is very lively and engages between 40 and 80 people. The project manager organises the participatory process, bringing together different actors, initiating and organising projects as well as giving a general direction of the project work. In Tenever, everybody who lives, works or carries any responsibility locally is invited to attend the meetings of the district group with the same right to speak. In addition to residents and local business owners, others such as Land and local politicians, Land and local administrators, housing associations, church and mosque representatives, charities and housing associations attend the meetings. Women tend to be somewhat overrepresented and migrants underrepresented. Young people are more likely to attend if something that is of concern to them is being discussed, for example constructing a skateboard ramp or converting an empty shop into a gym.

### Managing “risks”

A number of challenges were anticipated, and encountered, when citizens were asked to participate in the decision-making process. It is necessary to manage unrealistic expectations of what participation on the local level can achieve and to what degree underrepresented segments of societies such as migrants get involved. Some migrants also face a language barrier, which prevents them from fully participating in the district group.

There is a risk that the participatory process in Tenever is not sufficiently democratic. First, although district meetings are open to anyone, the district group members are not democratically elected to represent their neighbourhood. Second, transparency in the decision-making process is sometimes lacking (according to some project leaders). In addition, there is a strong presence of professional actors in these meetings. There is a risk of having a *de facto* top-down approach that is not embedded in the community. Local projects that were implemented in Tenever were very often initiated by the professional project leaders rather than by local residents. Finally, a clear strategic orientation is sometimes missing, and there is a lack of objective criteria to assess and evaluate projects. Each project proposal cannot be evaluated in all thoroughness during the annual workshop or in the district group due to time restraints, so that a basis for evaluating projects during the decision-making process is lacking. An objective set of criteria which form a clear strategic orientation is still missing despite defined priorities. However, citizens play an active and decisive role when it comes to evaluating and approving projects. In fact, the high competency in evaluating and assessing new projects by residents contributes to deeper local ownership of the projects.

### Impact of WiN – Soziale Stadt

Merging WiN, with its focus on social improvements, and Soziale Stadt, with its focus on structural improvements, has been seen as a chance to solve highly complex structural and social problems. The combined programmes contributed a greater identification of residents with their neighbourhood and a greater capability to solve or ease some of the issues facing Tenever residents. It prevents Tenever from becoming a social hot spot and contributes to more stability and peaceful relations among neighbours.

WiN – Soziale Stadt is a landmark initiative in dealing with social and structural issues in distressed urban neighbourhoods. It was the first time an integrative and complex programme was launched on a large scale. A noticeable improvement regarding the structural and social situation was measured in Tenever. This has also been reflected in district police records. Efforts are made to include as many local residents as possible in the

district group meetings and projects through effective media dissemination. During the programme phase an increase in project activities and participation of local residents was measured. In many cases, this was also the first time that different actors, that is all relevant Land and city authorities, local working groups, housing associations, NGO, etc. worked effectively and continuously together.

However, WiN – Soziale Stadt's longer term sustainability is less well-documented. There is a danger that if all WiN – Soziale Stadt funds, including stabilising or “phasing out” funds, are withdrawn then the level of activity may decline, although this is not likely to happen in the near future. Both WiN and Soziale Stadt have been approved until 2010. The strong political will in Bremen to improve distressed urban areas such as Tenever suggests that these programmes will continue in one form or another.

## Evolution of WiN – Soziale Stadt

In 2004, an external evaluation was carried out by two independent research institutes Institut für Stadtforschung und Strukturpolitik GmbH, Berlin (IfS) and Forschungsinstitut Stadt und Region, Bremen (ForStaR). Both institutions came to a positive conclusion regarding the impact and organisation of WiN – Soziale Stadt in the ten pilot neighbourhoods. Since January 2005, the programme has continued in a slightly different format and financing modus to take account of improvements that have been made in some districts. Although Tenever has gained much from WiN – Soziale Stadt, it remains one of the neighbourhoods that warrants continued support from this programme.

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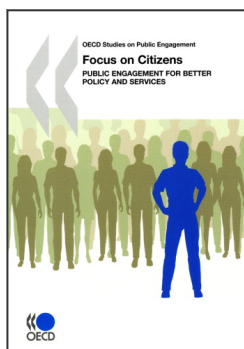
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