

Aldona Wiktorska-Święcka

University of Wrocław (Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0002-4240-7023

e-mail: [aldona.wiktorska-swiecka@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:aldona.wiktorska-swiecka@uwr.edu.pl)

## Co-Creation of Local Development and Effective Public Participation.

### *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* („Social Cohesion”) Programme in Berlin as an Example of Practice<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Co-creation of public policy can be considered a democratic innovation, all the more so as this approach seems to secure the possibility of „redefining what is democracy”. Understood this way, it is a direct source of changes in urban governance systems. Hence, the essence of the considerations is reflection on co-creation as a principle regulating the current urban governance practices and public participation in Berlin. The subject of the analysis in the empirical part of the paper is the *Sozialer Zusammenhang* („Social Cohesion”) Programme implemented since 2020. The aim is to present the specificity accompanying co-creation with citizens and evaluate the solutions’ effectiveness. Particular attention is paid to the key issue of what institutional arrangements support co-creation in a specific local context, i.e., at the neighbourhood level, and to discuss to what extent they can be considered effective public participation.

**Keywords:** *urban governance, local development, participation, Berlin, co-creation of public policy*

## Introduction

The complexity and interdependence of challenges accompanying socio-economic, cultural and technological changes significantly affect the patterns of public administration. Moreover, they are supported by citizens’ dissatisfaction and distrust towards politics and its

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representatives (Held, 2007, p. 9). The response is the transformation of democracy, which contributes to developing new channels for citizens' political involvement. In the concept of co-creation, developed in the late 1990s, seeking synergy between the administration's and citizens' activities was emphasised. Co-creation, which takes various institutional forms, is essentially about bringing key stakeholders together to solve problems and, as such, is strongly rooted, especially at the local political level. It is a place of transformation where democratic innovations are generated, implemented and disseminated (Parkinson, 2007, p. 24). Moreover, a direct reaction to it is the development and implementation of solutions, which may be a response to the postulate of „re-democratisation”, understood as the modernisation of the existing ones by adapting them to new conditions requiring creative involvement of citizens in public governance, and specific approaches, methods, techniques and tools are designed and implemented to „democratise democracy” (Offe, 2011). Co-creation, defined as „changing the rules of the innovation game from designing for people to designing with people” (Correia et al., 2016), can therefore be considered a democratic innovation, all the more so as this approach seems to secure the possibility of „redefining what democracy is” (Ansell & Torfing, 2021, p. 24).

Understood this way, it is a direct source of changes in the local political system. Hence, the essence of the paper is the reflection on co-creation as the principle regulating the existing practices in public participation of residents in urban governance. The subject of the analysis in the empirical part of the article is the *Sozialer Zusammenhang* („Social Cohesion”) programme implemented in Berlin. Particular attention was paid to what institutional solutions support co-creation in a specific local context, i.e., at the neighbourhood level, and to what extent they can be considered effective public participation.

## **Towards Co-Creation in Local Development Governance in Berlin: Context and Conditions of Institutional Practice**

At the heart of the concept of public governance in Germany are positions that are essentially related to public participation in creating a democratic state (Nanz & Fritsche, 2012, p. 12). However, it should be taken into account that in the German literature on the subject, there is much freedom in using the term „participation”, and there is no clear rule that the authors follow when proposing a given term. The most common of these is *Bürgerbeteiligung* (citizen involvement), but more general terms such as *bürgerschaftliches/ehrenamtliches/freiwilliges engagement* (voluntary, voluntary involvement) and increasingly *Partizipation* (participation) can also be found. Some researchers use them interchangeably, not noticing significant differences in meaning (Alcántara, 2014), while others emphasise their specific and detailed features (Thewes et al., 2014, p. 4). The line of demarcation between *Bürgerbeteiligung* and *Partizipation* seems particularly important. *Bürgerbeteiligung* is a term that indicates that participation is initiated top-down by decision-makers (politics, public administration), while *Partizipation* describes a bottom-up approach initiated by citizens

(Thewes et al., 2014, p. 4). Based on this specificity, the literature additionally distinguishes *mobilisierte Partizipation* (mobilised participation), *spontane Partizipation* (spontaneous participation) and *kreative Partizipation* (creative participation) (Kersting, 2013, p. 1). In terms of *mobilised participation*, this may mean situations where a public mobilisation and/or an invitation to top-down initiated participation is required (Roth, 2014, p. 4). It means pre-adopted „defined participation structures (formal and informal instruments)” (Waegerle, 2013, p. 11). In the context of *spontaneous participation*, *ad-hoc* activities and „new spaces of civic engagement and self-activity of civil society” (Roth, 2014, p. 8) can be observed. Finally, concerning *creative participation*, it is assumed that there are „spaces of participation that have emerged autonomously” or „flexible forms of influence on urban design and development processes” (Waegerle, 2013, p. 9) that exhibit characteristics specific to co-creation (Torfing et al., 2021, p. 191). At the same time, it should be taken into account that due to the characteristics of the political system in Germany and its strong attachment to representative democracy, specific experiences in grassroots participation of citizens, which were often associated with protests and oscillated on the verge of political involvement, and finally due to the key element for spatial development and the related quality of life, the transition from the traditional model of formal top-down participation, limited to expressing opinions and consultations, to an innovative model based on a bottom-up approach, based on co-creation with stakeholders and the involvement of citizens as decision-makers, means effort for everyone interested parties.

The identified concept of public participation in Berlin seems to consider the aspects described above, along with their dilemmas and challenges. Berlin, the capital of Germany, is a federal city, which affects its specific and unique administrative structure. Due to its decentralised formula, together with 12 districts and 100 *Kiez* (Berlin term for „neighbourhood”), it can be described as a unique urban laboratory (Oswald, 2000, p. 18) where tailor-made solutions for residents are invented and tested in practice. The institutionalisation of public participation in Berlin refers to city development planning processes and has been implemented for decades. Therefore, it may come as a surprise that despite the specific *genius loci* of Berlin, the essence of which is being *arm, aber sexy* („poor but sexy” (Wowereit, in Frey, 2003)), „against the current” and a place where „all the walls are coming down” (Oswald, 2000, p. 20), the mainstream solutions related to the institutionalisation of public participation include those characteristics of *mobilised and spontaneous participation*, while the first formal regulations regarding the support of space for *creative participation*, i.e. the participatory governance that takes into account the assumptions of the concept of co-creation with citizens, were formally adopted only a few years ago (Leitlinien, 2019).

A special example of a solution-oriented towards *creative participation* is the *Soziale Stadt* („Social City”) programme. From the beginning of its implementation, it included residents’ involvement in neighbourhood governance processes, i.e., selected areas within the administrative boundaries of individual districts that were disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic life. The idea and goal of the programme were to improve living conditions

in these areas, and social cohesion was to be achieved through the involvement of residents in solving local problems in an integrated way tailored to specific needs, expectations and conditions, as well as in a partnership and interdisciplinary way. The programme is one of the elements of an integrated approach to the development of urban investments and, together with the underlying participation and support funds, is part of the so-called *Integriertes Städtebauliches Entwicklungskonzept* (ISEK) („Integrated City Development Concept”) ([www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de](http://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de)). Launched in 1999, the programme initiated by the German federal government and implemented by the Berlin Senate initially had the formula of a pilot project planned for three years. It was aimed at supporting initiatives undertaken by citizens in the formula of *mobilised* and, occasionally, *spontaneous participation* (<https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/unser-programm/berliner-quartiersmanagement.html>). Due to the positive impact on the development of neighbourhoods, a decision was made to continue the activities, and on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its implementation, based on the results of the evaluation carried out in 2017–2019 with the participation of residents, many significant changes were introduced. From 2020, the programme is called *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* („Social Cohesion”), which has been supplemented with the subtitle *Zusammenleben in der Nachbarschaft* („Living Together in the Neighborhood”). Along with the new name, a key element related to the current paradigm of participation was modified, and solutions were introduced towards creative participation, according to which the activation and participation of the district’s residents take place in various forms, also going beyond the existing legal regulations. The currently adopted solutions are the result of their co-creation with the residents and are an attempt to institutionalise co-creation as a principle regulating activities for the development of the neighbourhood.

The concept of co-creating neighbourhood development translates into an ambitious approach based on rooting citizens and stakeholders in the process in which they become the main actors, including primary decision-makers, and not only beneficiaries or only users of public services provided. The basis of the participatory approach is the integrated (interdisciplinary) concepts of activities developed together with them. They are based on five fields of action: a) Integration and neighbourhood; b) Education; c) Public places; d) Health and Participation; e) Networking and cooperation of partners. The latter area includes, in particular, sectors oriented at the dissemination, development and strengthening of public participation and includes: a) Participation and activation of residents; b) Supporting the involvement and self-organisation of residents; c) Support and networking of local actors, local economy and other structures; d) Local support services for people experiencing poverty, including the transition to the labour market; e) Support for residents and cooperation with key players in the area of housing (<https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/unser-programm/programmstrategie.html>).

The programme, developed since 2020 with residents in local communities in Berlin in the complicated conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, is a specific example of a co-creation laboratory. On a micro-scale, it allows testing solutions relating to bottom-up participation

and aims at optimal development, as well as securing the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. Currently, the programme supports 34 areas covering an area of 2,200 hectares inhabited by over 400,000 people ([www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de](http://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de)).

## Methodological Assumptions

The analysis carried out in this part is based on the features and benefits of effective public participation proposed by J. L. Creighton. The principles proposed here are generalisations based on experience (Creighton, 2005, p. xv) and case study analyses and can be considered as a theory of effective public participation formulated based on induction. Creighton defined public participation as „the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into government and corporate decision-making” (Creighton, p. 18). He also recognised that the benefits of public participation are not certainties, and its success is conditioned by specific factors that must exist to guarantee this success. A key element in achieving this is two-way communication and interaction, with the overall goal of „better decisions legitimised by society” (Creighton, p. 7), with the caveat that „people cannot participate until they have complete and objective information on which to base their judgments” (ibidem, p. 9). The principles proposed by Creighton make it possible to define a framework that enables detailed analysis, more so because their adaptability allows the use of various methods and taking into account contextual factors.

The features and benefits indicated by Creighton serve as reference points for assessing the effectiveness of public participation in the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme. The underlying hypothesis builds on the belief that the observed benefits translate into the quality of decisions made at the neighbourhood level, as the programme formula considers the key features of co-creation. For the analysis of the selected case study, secondary data were used, which were explored in 2021–2022 and verified using various methods, including an in-depth review of the literature and institutional documents, study visits and a semi-structured in-depth interview conducted with a representative of the Berlin Senate. On this basis, several general research questions were posed regarding the effectiveness of the co-creation process and specific characteristics regarding the extent to which the programme supports transformation in the neighbourhood and acts as a catalyst for its development. To verify the questions posed, a new institutionalism theory was used, which expresses the belief that social relations are largely determined by institutions, which should be understood in a normative approach (Goodin, 1996). The consequence of adopting a methodological perspective was the selection of methods enabling the verification of theses similar to theory-based evaluation (Stame, 2004). However, due to the framework of this study, detailed consideration of all its specific elements was neither desirable nor possible.

## Results

The solutions institutionalising public participation adopted under the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme show the features formulated by Creighton. Based on the analysis of the assumptions, solutions confirming the following features of effective public participation can be identified:

### 1. How decision-makers were given the mandate to act

The nature of the decision-making method in the case of the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme changed in terms of detailed solutions during its many years of implementation. From today's perspective, it should be emphasised that the essence itself has not changed and is still based on interdepartmental coordination within the administration and the culture of public participation. In this approach, residents, social institutions, local economic entities, housing cooperatives, administration bodies and other organisations cooperate, and the formal basis for this cooperation is an inter-ministerial social strategy focused on a given area (neighbourhood), supported by an integrated approach supporting residents in their involvement for co-creating the development of the area in which they live and function daily.

The local administration representation and various teams that have an impact on neighbourhood management are a key institutional pillar on which the implementation of the jointly developed *Integriertes Handlungs- und Entwicklungskonzept* („Integrated Action and Development Concept”) is based, among others through a building fund. The formal body deciding on the use of funds for the development of a given area is the neighbourhood councils, which take over responsibility for the neighbourhood and, thanks to participation in a formalised process, can directly influence the decisions made. The Neighbourhood Council has various co-decision possibilities at the neighbourhood level. These include planning the neighbourhood's short- and long-term development, housing estate and district, specific design ideas, and the distribution of available financial resources (*Beteiligungsmodelle in der Sozialen Stadt*, 2018). Residents are involved in the work of the Neighbourhood Council voluntarily and often for long periods. This involvement is important to the quality of decision-making as council representatives bring experience and knowledge to get to know the neighbourhood best.

In the course of joint reflection on 20 years of neighbourhood management, the principles of neighbourhood councils as set out in the *Rahmengesäftsordnung für Quartiersräte in Gebieten des Programms Sozialer Zusammenhalt Berlin* („Framework order of functioning of neighbourhood councils in areas covered by the Social Cohesion Programme”) were revised, and the result is their modernisation, increased transparency, simplification and greater flexibility of provisions regarding practical application. In a formal process, decisions directly influenced by the administration and the represented groups are binding on decision-makers (*20 Jahre Berliner Quartiersmanagement Bilanz und Perspektiven für die*

*Soziale Stadt*, 2019). In addition, neighbourhood councils assume responsibility in many areas related to the subsequent implementation of decisions taken, including by appointing spokespersons who represent their affairs externally and are accountable in relations with the public administration (<https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/unser-programm/quartiersraete-und-beteiligungsmoeglichkeiten.html>).

## 2. Integration of the public participation process with the decision-making process

The basic principle in implementing the *Sozialer Zusammenhang* programme is public participation, which thus constitutes the regulator of all assumptions related to its implementation and resulting actions, and is practised permanently and systematically. Participation as a principle applies both at the strategic level, when significant changes for the entire programme are discussed, including the issues of new priorities, designating new areas of support, making decisions on ending support for a given neighbourhood, and at the operational level, i.e., when are decisions on matters concerning the use and distribution of funds, as well as other more detailed matters relevant to individual neighbourhoods. Integrating the public participation process with the decision-making is secured by considering the provisions of the jointly developed „Integrated Concept of Action and Development” by all participants at all stages and levels.

## 3. Involvement of citizens at every stage of the decision-making process

The fulfilment of this condition for effective public participation is to secure the method of institutionalisation of neighbourhood councils. They count from 15 to 25 people each, and at least 51% of their composition are residents. The remaining part is filled by formalised entities operating in the neighbourhood, i.e., representatives of clubs, schools, community centres, religious communities, housing cooperatives and communities, and the administration itself. It is also important to represent diverse groups in terms of gender, age and origin. Council members are elected for two-year terms at open events by neighbourhood residents. The local administration office takes actions to encourage and mobilise residents to stand for election to councils. In addition, anyone who lives in the area and is 16 or older is eligible to vote or may be elected as a member of the neighbourhood council. Special skills are not necessary. The local administration informs residents on the website and in the public space about the elections and promotes individual candidates (*20 Jahre Berliner Quartiersmanagement Bilanz und Perspektiven für die Soziale Stadt*).

The decision-making process, crucial for the subsequent implementation of specific actions, concerns primarily the development of *Integriertes Handlungs- und Entwicklungskonzept* („Integrated Action and Development Concept”). This process has been actively monitored since its launch by the Neighborhood Council and is based on a jointly developed action plan approved by the Berlin Senate. It secures the participation of both residents and the neighbourhood council at every key decision-making stage, and the process itself includes both elements of mobilised, spontaneous, creative participation.

#### 4. Ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders

The principle of reaching all residents of a given area is an open formula of public participation and support activities undertaken by the local administration to promote opportunities to engage in decision-making. Research systematically monitoring progress conducted by the Berlin Senate shows that formalised forms of public participation are mainly attended by better-educated residents (*Auswertung der Befragung der Quartiersräte und Aktionsfondsjurys in 34 Quartieren des Programms Soziale Stadt*, 2017). However, in many areas of neighbourhood management, it is not always possible to effectively reach out to specific groups that require special support, such as children and young people, women with a migrant background, refugees or seniors. To meet this challenge, measures based on non-bureaucratic procedures, respectful communication and building trust by cultivating a relationship that appeals to high cultural sensitivity and diversity management are specifically targeted and addressed to them. Examples of solutions to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders are women's breakfasts, activation surveys conducted in the languages of individual groups, face-to-face meetings and conversations at public events. Of particular importance here are the so-called *ad hoc* „peer groups” or the work of cultural mediators.

Furthermore, residents participate in training and education to develop social and personal competencies and acquire or develop skills useful in public activity (for example, raising funds for local projects). In addition, residents have the opportunity to network and integrate, e.g., during the annual Congress of Neighbourhood Councils, which results in a continuation of cooperation after the end of participation in the programme and the creation of joint institutions (e.g., non-governmental organisations) and initiatives that implement subsequent projects for the development of the neighbourhood.

Finally, a specific solution to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders under the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme is the possibility of spontaneous, short-term and less formalised involvement in small-scale projects, the financing of which is decided by the inhabitants, as an additional solution, which is the *Aktionsfondffjury* („Equity Fund Committee”). This formula is addressed to people who want to get involved in the process of making decisions regarding the neighbourhood, often on a one-off or *ad hoc* basis, concerning activities on a micro scale, which is most often the result of interest in meeting individual needs and expectations. Voluntary solutions proposed and implemented by residents are supported in order to improve and beautify common spaces in the neighbourhood (e.g., a street festival, purchase of social games for the youth club, volleyball tournament, joint work in the garden or flea market for children) (Adelhof, 2022). *Aktionsfondffjury* considers this particular profile of interest in public participation and has an idea similar to the method of institutionalising neighbourhood councils. However, the way it works is less formal, more flexible and agreed and decided by the residents themselves at the micro level, i.e., within the scope of one jointly developed project (<https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/unser-programm/berliner-quartiersmanagement.html>). In this case, interested residents are supported by the



local administration in preparing a one-page application form, which is then submitted to the *Aktionsfondsfury* for voting.

#### 5. Use of different techniques to reach different audiences

The basic principles of public participation under the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme are informal participation, non-bureaucratic procedures, respectful communication and building trust by nurturing relationships between all involved in achieving a partnership network for neighbourhood development. To reach different recipients, various techniques are practised that are most attractive to them and which they consider the friendliest. The most typical ones include neighbourhood conferences, forums, workshops and public discussions.

Thanks to the practical implementation of the assumptions of the programme, the features of which have been specified above, the following benefits can be stated in terms of the quality of decisions made, which arose thanks to effective public participation:

#### 1. Improving the quality of decisions made thanks to public participation

Each neighbourhood has its specificity, which makes it different and unique. Nevertheless, it can be stated that some universal features allow defining the boundary conditions for adopting general principles of public participation within the analysed programme. The key factor is the direct involvement of residents and their organisations in the decision-making process and their direct impact on the final shape of the adopted and implemented solutions. In addition, in the process of improving the quality of decisions made, it is important to secure the possibility of co-creating optimal and legitimised by the group of target users solutions, as well as institutional support provided by the administration, including in the field of formal frameworks, which, on the one hand, guarantee legal security, and, on the other hand, are constructed in a such a way that they mobilise and activate to participate. It is also helpful to secure a stable and targeted offer supporting the development of each neighbourhood, including financing activities related to the participatory decision-making process, as well as projects and activities developed in this mode. The improvement of the quality of decisions is also influenced by systematic monitoring and periodic evaluations, which are carried out in an accessible, understandable, open and partnership way with the residents. In this way, co-creation as an accepted concept of public participation remains an effectively functioning laboratory where new approaches and ideas for neighbourhood development are generated, and high-quality decisions are developed and taken.

#### 2. Minimising costs and delays thanks to public participation

Based on the survey of participants' opinions, it was noticed that where there is a high involvement of residents in co-creating the development of the neighbourhood and joint actions are taken in which residents can participate in the development of local problems, the perception of their real impact on the environment and changing it into the one desired

by each other was noticed and appreciated (*Auswertung der Befragung Stadt*, 2017). There were, among others, opinions that „together we can achieve more, and now we know how we can get involved”. Some respondents overcame their prejudices and understood how complex the decision-making process is and why cooperation is important to optimise it. The perception of how decisions are made that translate into neighbourhood development has also changed in favour: „More people are participating instead of just complaining” (*Auswertung der Befragung Stadt*, 2017).

### 3. Consensus building through public participation

Despite the increase in residents’ awareness of the possibility of participating in local development processes, their actions do not necessarily lead to the permanent and continuous organisation of resident groups and the rooting of a culture of co-creation in a given neighbourhood. Institutionalising structures are necessary here, and their practical implementation, e.g., in the form of neighbourhood councils, means that residents acquire key qualifications to participate in democratic negotiation processes. They learn to express their opinion, and the cooperation of residents with the administration, politics and local institutions helps to break down barriers at the local level, build closeness and exchange of views, which ultimately allows them to develop trust in politics and administration and develop the necessary consensus.

### 4. Facilitating the implementation of the programme thanks to public participation

The implementation of the *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme is facilitated by ensuring the functioning of practical solutions, such as *Nachbarschaftszentren* („neighbourhood centres’) and other open spaces and places of neighbourly interaction, which can be used free of charge to encourage residents to engage in activities for neighbourhood development and creating conditions for co-creation. These spaces host numerous events created by the interested parties themselves.

### 5. Avoiding confrontation through public participation

Extensive efforts to involve all residents in participatory governance at the neighbourhood level are effective as long as they are tailored to their needs and interests. The approach used in the programme makes it possible to include in the planning of specific solutions not only typical socio-economic data, such as age and social status of residents but also attitudes, values and a general view of the life of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, which is the so-called environmental approach (<https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/unser-programm/berliner-quartiersmanagement.html>). It is necessary when situations require cultural sensitivity and knowledge of the specificity of individual groups to better moderate the communication between those involved in public participation processes and prevent potential conflicts. This competence is particularly important when stereotypes, prejudices, or un- and anti-democratic behaviours are involved.

## 6. Maintaining credibility and legitimacy through public participation

Thanks to the participatory approaches developed under the programme, it is possible to involve many residents in neighbourhood development activities. The issue of legitimising participatory bodies has been secured at the level of institutional solutions, e.g., a neighbourhood council consisting of at least eight residents and seven representatives of local entities. In all areas supported by the programme, representatives elected by the residents make decisions about strategic projects and budgetary decisions. In addition, various participation models were guaranteed, such as ombudsmen representing residents in contact with public administration, peer groups, and mediators. It is also important to organise the election of members of the estate council in such a way that many different residents take part in the election, so that the composition of the estate council is as representative as possible.

## 7. Anticipating public expectations and needs through public participation

Thanks to the solutions developed as part of the implemented participatory approaches, it is possible to get to know the inhabitants of a given neighbourhood better, their needs, and expectations, and the possibilities of getting involved in its development. That is why management teams are constantly expanding the range of formats related to public participation in a given area and diversifying them depending on the profile of residents. Since there is no one-size-fits-all format that equally addresses the needs of all, this is how the diversity of interests is considered. On this basis, the projects necessary to meet the needs of the residents are taken into account, which are included in the area's development strategy.

## 8. Development of civil society through public participation

Based on the analyses, it was observed that in the neighbourhoods where the implementation of the Sozialer Zusammenhalt programme was completed, it was possible to create conditions for the self-organisation of residents thanks to their earlier activation and participation in decision-making processes and translate them into specific projects for the development of individual areas, e.g., the result of the implementation is the establishment of civic committees that continue activities for the benefit of the neighbourhood (*Beteiligungsmodelle in der Sozialen Stadt*, 2018).

Moreover, the research conclusions indicate that the residents involved in the activities of the neighbourhood councils initially perceived the contradiction of their positions with the administrative activities and processes of the programme. It has led to disappointment in expectations and disappointment in bureaucracy. However, thanks to participation and participation in the programme, councillors gained a good insight into administrative processes, and the experience of working in the council opened perspectives on issues relevant to public affairs. Participation in the programme allowed for a creative translation of the principles of local democracy into concrete projects: dialogue, cooperation, trust, and partnership. The long-term nature of involvement also leads to a sustainable form of citizen participation and a local experience of democracy (Adelhof, 2022).

## Conclusion

Governance as a specific, normatively oriented concept of regulating common matters, assumes the involvement of citizens in the co-creation of policies and public services and their delivery. The state and its agencies, including the local government, play the role of organiser and coordinator, and entities from the private and civil sectors, including the residents themselves, play the role of partners. The multiplicity and diversity of stakeholders involved in the network and their pluralism, become the dominant element of the interactive management system, in which the principle regulating mutual relations between participants is cooperation. In this normative, optimistic version of the doctrine, the relations between the links in the network are based on trust and partnership cooperation to achieve jointly defined values and goals, not profits, and public participation of citizens is the way to regulate these relations. It allows for greater social acceptance and optimisation of decisions made, and its basis is a mutual relationship between the local authority and all citizens, i.e. participants of the local political community. In this way, it secures the possibility of greater influence of citizens and their organisations on the decisions of public authorities in matters affecting them. Public participation is evolving towards solutions that emphasise the formalised, consensual and deliberative dimension of the participatory co-governance process, which includes both co-creation and implementation of public policy (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 548). Indicating co-creation as a practical principle of public service delivery, this approach aims to make public governance more personal, efficient and thus more effective. Co-creation is therefore understood as the voluntary involvement of users (end recipients/beneficiaries/citizens) of public services in their design, management, delivery or evaluation (Osborne et al., 2016, p. 639), ultimately to contribute to improving the quality of services (Needham, 2008, p. 224) and strengthen the relationship between the administration and citizens (Flederud et al., 2014, p. 428).

The *Sozialer Zusammenhalt* programme is aimed at co-creation in neighbourhood development processes. Many techniques have been used here that consider the features of effective public participation and which have been strongly secured. The key element is to include the public participation of residents in a formula that fully integrates it with the decision-making process. In addition, stakeholders are involved in this process permanently, it has been secured at the institutional level, and the effects of decisions regarding neighbourhood development, taken by the administration and politicians or their authorised representatives, and the residents of a given area, translate into real projects and activities.

To sum up, the public participation of residents in the case of the analysed programme brings the expected benefits, e.g., it contributes to increasing the information base on expectations, needs, opportunities and activities, improves the quality of decisions, reduces some costs, and also supports by avoiding confrontation. In addition, it allows one to anticipate social concerns and attitudes and stimulates the development of civil society.

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