Intervention-linked Community Research: An Underestimated Method of Community Organising? Insights from the City Lab Bochum-Hustadt

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Abstract

Community Organising is usually not conceptualized as research and vice versa community research is not conducted with the aim of community organising. However, in our contribution, we draw attention to the many parallels between community organising and intervention-linked community research practiced in the Bochum City Lab. We first introduce the working methods of the City Lab and then present its historical development. On the example of the research project "EMPOWER" - we will show how collaborative knowledge production can foster processes of politization and empowerment. We will close with a comparative view on theory and practice of community organising and the City Lab concept.

Introduction

> *"Apart from inquiry, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."* Paulo Freire (1970, 72)

Paulo Freire laid important foundations for community organising (CO) and still is a central point of reference for CO theory and practice. However, it is noticeable that the aspect of knowledge production and research often plays a subordinate role. Using the example of City Lab Bochum, we would like to link Freire's understanding of knowledge production in a sense of constant and hopeful inquiries with our understanding of participatory action research (PAR) and community organising as methods for engaging communities grounded in the conviction that social change is based on interconnectedness.

Community organising is defined as "a process through which residents come together and build social power to investigate and take sustained collective action on systemic issues that negatively affect their daily lives." (Christens et al. 2021: 3002). For Participatory Action Research Cornish et al. (2023) define six building blocks: "building relationships; establishing working practices; establishing a common understanding of the issue; observing, gathering and generating materials; collaborative analysis; and planning and taking action." These two definitions alone raise the question of similarities in approach and objectives that has already been discussed for a long time and extends from a strict separation of the two approaches (Christen et al. 2021) to the thematization of their numerous points of connection (see e.g. Minkler 2012). What the literature has in common is that it refers to PAR as a method that is generally used to carry out temporary research projects to empower people and develop concrete interventions. The clearest criticism is that although relevant knowledge is produced, no changes are addressed at a political level. "The presumption that social change emerges from the rational implications from research findings rather than the application of power to affect change—are key to distinguishing engaged/ participatory research from community organising." (Christen et al. 2021: 3003) However, we would like to argue that it is possible to strengthen the interconnection of both approaches by the establishment of permanent and sustainable structures and places of research cooperations. On the example of the City Lab Bochum Hustadt we furthermore show, that a permanent place of cooperation has the potential to form an organisational framework for the mutual and systematic enrichment of both approaches.

We will first introduce the history, working methods and principles of the City Lab. Based on the example of the international research project "EMPOWER – Empowering Cities of Migration" - we will show how intervention-linked collaborative knowledge production can foster processes of politization and empowerment. We will close with a comparative view on theory and practice of Community Organising and our approach within the City Lab to argue that a stronger methodological, structural and practical interlocking of Community Research (CR) and Community Organising (CO) would be mutually beneficial.

Disclaimer: Can a journal article co-produced by scientists and community researchers be participatory at all, or is it more a form of tokenism? Full participation would first have to create speakability and dialogue (Freire 1970) of the community researchers involved. This requires familiarity with specific scientific discourses. This article is based on iterative processes of collaborative theory discussion and reflection on our own practice. Even though the translation into a text was carried out by the academics involved, we make the collaborative thinking and

work visible by naming as authors all those involved. With this approach, we also want to question hierarchising concepts of authorship in an academic context (Blank and Nimführ 2023).

Local and Academic Context of the City Lab Bochum Hustadt

The district inner Hustadt is a large housing estate on the outskirts of Bochum, characterized by migration, poverty and diverse forms of marginalization. It is one of the youngest neighbourhoods in Bochum, an over average quota of people living on social benefits (see Bochumer Ortsteile Kompakt 2022). The district is characterised by one of the highest health inequality index in the city (City of Bochum 2023 a, b and 2021) and the residents' health is additionally affected by discrimination and institutional racism (Falge et al. 2023). Overall, the neighbourhood is considered to be over proportionately disadvantaged. At the same time, the importance of conviviality and neighbourly solidarity as a considerable part of people's lives is not be underestimated. It constitutes a central resource.

The City Lab Bochum was established in Hustadt in 2016 as a collaborative research and health promotion project. It is based on the holistic World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO Constitution 1948). The WHO also highlighted "the empowerment of communities, their ownership and control of their own endeavours and destinies" in their programmatic Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986). Subsequently the City Lab is based on concepts of Community Health (DoCH Bochum 2022), with a strong focus on Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) and therefore works at the intersection of health and social issues. On the basis of the inspiring work of Minkler et al. (2012) and their discussion of the interconnection of research and community organising, we try to get a step further with the City Lab and set up a structurally anchored, permanent place where it is possible to build sustainable relationships of trust in the triad of communities, academia, and practical work in the form of social and health care organisations and institutions as well as social movements.

The City Lab stands in an anthropological tradition that effectively reformulates questions of domination and inequity[1] and provides a space where academics and citizens can meet face-to-face in order to grasp the complexity of people's lives (see also Niewöhner 2014: 205, Lassiter 2008). This includes to understand lifeworld categories such as "health", "wellbeing" and "illness" in their (trans)culturally diverse meanings (Kleinman 1980). However, the City Lab is about much more than just jointly collecting divers data. Following the approach of Critical Engaged Anthropology it also includes "a wide range of activities like everyday practices of sharing, support, and personal interaction, teaching and public education, social critique, different forms of collaboration, advocacy and activism." (Low & Merry 2010, 204). This also means a long term and reliable commitment of academics to address public issues (Rappaport 1993). The City Lab aims for structural transformations by creating favourable conditions for people to be, become or stay healthy.

Chronology and Principles of the City Lab

The establishment of the City Lab Bochum was inspired by the Community Research Centre in Birmingham (CRCB) that was founded by Lisa Goodson (Associate Professor for Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology, University of Birmingham) and which Christiane Falge (Professor for health and diversity at University of Applied Sciences Bochum) first visited in 2015. Initial field access in the Hustadt was established with the help of existing social institutions in the

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[1] We prefer the usage of health inequities to highlight the inequality that is "avoidable and unfair". (Chokchi 2018)

neighbourhood and through an ethnographic research project based on weekly, three-day in-field research visits by Falge to a newly migrated Syrian family between October 2016 and July 2018.[2] The field was not limited to the family boundaries, but rather extended to its wider social network in the neighbourhood so that Falge gradually gained access to the wider Hustadt community. During this time, community researchers from Bochum trained in Birmingham undertook community research on health vulnerabilities in Hustadt and one community member received a community practitioner research degree.[3] This initial phase of the City Lab which coincided with the "long summer of migration" (Hess et al. 2016) in Germany ended with a participatory Vulnerability Assessment for Refugees and Migrants (RM-VA) in 2016. For several reasons however, none of the community researchers from this early phase continued community research.

At this stage, some community members communicated to Falge their objection to academic research which in their eyes was of little benefit to the neighbourhood. Based on this critique, Falge linked up with a local migrant organization and applied for funding for an intervention based health-project which led to the establishment of the health promoting project QUERgesund. This is when Silke Betscher (former deputy professor of health and diversity at University of Applied Sciences Bochum, now Professor for community work and macro social work at University of Applied Science Hamburg) joined the City Lab and conducted the first formal training in qualitative methods which provided the basis for establishing a permanent group of Community Researchers from the neighbourhood. These community researchers were recruited with a focus on the greatest possible degree of diversity. In the QUERgesund project following the collaborative research phase, stakeholders were involved via a participatory steering committee and neighbourhood network and research data was presented in workshops to local CSOs and developed into diversity-sensitive health services. QUERgesund was the first collaborative project in the area that funded services based on community research.

> *"For me, Hustadt is like a home. I want to make life in Hustadt better. I love the people here. As migrants, they don't know what to do. They need help. We do everything for the people here, make better what they want. I think that's great. We believe what people say. We are in the centre, we believe the people. And we have contact with the people. And I think that's very good, maybe we're doing better for the community too. I think that's really great."* (Nahera Ahmed)

Since 2016, five intervention-linked research projects with different topics (health prevention, housing/migration/integration, Covid-19-community experiences, access to online health information) were conducted in the Hustadt. For instance, the health prevention research led to the establishment of diversity sensitive prevention offers.[4] Every time, funding included financial compensation for community researchers' time and effort. As part of the collaborative knowledge production process every research inquiry starts with concrete, locally relevant questions that lead to general topics of social and health injustice. During the methodological training, questionnaires are jointly developed, in which the existing community knowledge plays a crucial role with regard to the content and culturally appropriate verbal expression. In the subsequent research process, knowledge on specific topics and needs in the neighbourhood is collected and transformed into interventions. Students from the "Health and Diversity"

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[2] The time Falge actually spent in the family is limited to evenings, nights and mornings as she was doing this fieldwork after work at the university.

[3] The Community Practitioner Research Programm (CPRP) is based at the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham (see https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/superdiversity-institute/practitioner-research-programme/index.aspx).

[4] Stadtteillabor Forschungsprojekte | Hochschule für Gesundheit (hs-gesundheit.de)

programme at the Department of Community Health are usually involved in this phase. They contribute important time resources and in exchange learn how to act in a diversity-sensitive manner in multi-diverse settings. Due to the expertise the Community Researchers have built up over the years, they now take the students "under their wing" and teach them how to undertake collaborative research. The role and task of academics is to structure the whole process jointly and to keep an eye on the overall process.

Participatory interventions are produced from research results. At this point in time, the core group works together with other interested neighbours, institutions and politicians as well as activist groups. The fact that the City Lab is designed to be permanent makes it possible that people from very different backgrounds (regarding language, country of origin, religion, education, culture) come together, develop a shared work mode and build sustainable networks of trust. In this interpersonal context existing boundaries are crossed and a space of democratic discourse is created. Due to its permanent character, it is also possible to increasingly build up technical (Laptops, Online-Meetings, Translation-KI,…) and methodological expertise as well as knowledge in different areas, e.g. political participation and/or the ways institutions work. Education, knowledge production, the development of spokesperson positions and the establishment of relationships are intertwined and constantly cross-fertilise each other.

The knowledge generated is fed back into the communities via the Community Researcher's networks, but also processed and made public e.g. in community meetings, information material, videos and social media or community health conferences. This is a decisive step for the joint and collective ability to act, especially with people who have recently immigrated and/or have had repeated experiences of exclusion.

Over the years, the effects of our work on Community Researchers have become increasingly apparent. All projects had multiple effects and gradually increased the level of empowerment among the Community Researchers who steadily improved their ability to speak (in German and in public)[5] and increased their self-confidence for claims-making with regards to their rights as "German citizens" – a category that only recently replaced the category "foreigner" with which they self-identified prior to the dialogue established in the City Lab. The following quotes reflect these effects:

> *"I've gained a lot of self-confidence myself, got to know new cultures, improved my German and also made new friends at university or in society and in the city." (Nahera Ahmed)*

> *"For me, it has taken my experience, as they say, one step further and I have developed myself. It showed me a side of myself that I didn't know before." (Dilbuhar Amin)*

Working as a Community Researcher also altered their role within the community of origin and within the German Society:

> *"I now have this important role, so I am the contact person. Whenever people from the Somali community have problems, they come to me and ask me and I help them to solve their problem." (Deeqa Ismail)*

> *"Working as a Community Researcher gives me the feeling that I am working, that I am a part of this society as a woman, where I really feel that it is the only place where I get my recognition." (Nahera Ahmed)*

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[5] The City Lab context is one of the few contexts that CRs speak German at all.

In face of the significance of empowerment and leadership development to PAR and CO especially in working with local community leaders these quotes show that the City Lab is an organizational structure that empowers individuals and at the same time serves to overcome "the barriers to political action" and "in which participants can recognize and challenge narratives and can construct more agentic political identities," (Haapanen et al. 2023: 2). Additionally, cross-community relations and friendships were developed that are now the basis for shared action. This contributes to personal development and the self-perception of becoming a citizen endowed with rights:

> *"In the garden[6] there were some from Syria, some from Iraq and some from Turkey. At first, everyone had their own group. Then we worked together and talked together. We've become friends now. It's the same in Hustadt now. They meet up, not just Syrians, not just Turks. All together. We meet up. There are many friends from Somalia, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Germany." (Nahera Ahemd)*

The authors have grown into a solid group of committed "researcher-friends" who together developed a post-migrant perspective on urban health through intervention-linked community research. The group jointly expanded the thematic, theoretical and geographical frame of the City Lab which increasingly is influenced by theories of social inequality and inequity with an awakening endeavour to strive for community empowerment and transformation.

Over time we have developed the following programmatic principles for the City Lab:

- **Counter hierarchies of knowledge:** We actively counteract the hierarchisation of different forms of knowledge and emphasize their intersections and mutual dependencies to make marginalized and situated knowledge (Haraway 2016, Spivak 1988) visible and to open discourse spaces in which multi-diverse communities become visible and audible.

- **Power-critical, post-migrant and decolonial perspectives:** The City Lab follows a decolonial approach by engaging with and learning from health-related community movements from the global South in joint research projects. Working in a power-critical, post-migrant perspective (Falge & Betscher 2022) means not only to understand health and social inequities in the context of racial capitalism (Gilmore 2022), but also to continuously reflect on the power inequalities that are effective in our cooperation between academics and communities. With our work we counter the hegemonic fiction of supposedly "hard-to-reach" migrants with the reality of hard-to-access institutions of the majority society.[7]

- **Intervention-linked:** Our radically inclusive practice aims at social change in the sense of the social justice and radical diversity (SJRD) concept defined by Czollek et al. (2019).[8] Within the City Lab, this principle finds its concrete expression far beyond the concern for good scientific results in co-created, joint intervening practice in very different forms according to the motto 'data for action.' The interventions emerging from our research connect to SJRD by being embedded in the utopia and reality of radical diversity (Czolleck et a. 2019).

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[6] The garden project was one intervention that was collaboratively developed as result of the health prevention project based QuerGesund-research.

[7] A power-critical approach also means to reject attempts to redirect responsibilities from the state to communities as critically discussed under the term of community capitalism (van Dyk & Haubner 2022). Therefore, following Enggruber, empowerment does not mean to address the neoliberal subject in its self-responsibility (Enggruber 2003).

[8] "SJRD" is a concept that aims to bridge the gap between genealogical understandings of discrimination and phenomological approaches to diversity by thinking together four concepts of justice: justice of distribution and justice of recognition (as described by Marin I. Young) with justice of enablement and justice of realization (as described by Martha Nussbaum) (see Kaszner 2022:9).

- **Relationships, education and development:** In the City Lab, we see dialogue based on love, hope, humanity and critical thinking in the Freirean sense as an existential necessity for transformation (Freire 1970). With Deleuze and Guattari (1977) we understand our work as a rhizome: an enduring, increasingly unfolding web of connections on very different levels, in which community researchers increasingly take on the role of organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971). The different shoots of the rhizome sprout sometimes unpredictably and multi-directionally and multiple forms of projects, friendships, activism, research, etc. emerge simultaneously or consecutively.

In the following, we would like to show that the sustainable cooperation in the City Lab clearly has community organising elements and effects which, however, remain limited due to the lack of a systematic inclusion of community organising as a method.

The City Lab as Community Organising? – The example of the EMPOWER Project

The aim of the EMPOWER project (2021-2022)[9] was to provide new gender-aware insights in the integration challenges and opportunities of housing for individuals living in the three European cities of Bochum (Germany), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Birmingham (UK). The cities were selected on the basis of having long-standing and newly arrived migrant populations, high, yet different, levels and types of migration, and varying degrees of population diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Research in Bochum took place in the neighbourhoods of Uni Center and inner Hustadt (Bochum) selected for analysis based on the diversity of their resident populations and high levels of multiple deprivation. The research found insights about deteriorating housing conditions created by profit-oriented stocklisted housing companies at the expense of marginalized local residents. The research findings highlight how place-making is important for facilitating migrant integration and settlement and the role of significant others - such as friends, family and relatives - as well as the existing population and local organisations in shaping such processes. It highlighted residents' self-help strategies in maintaining their housing problems and showed the ways in which they can be empowered to work with those involved in the governance of neighbourhood and housing services to create appropriate and inclusive responses, and which facilitate engagement and empowerment.

Community researchers presented research findings during two Policy Cafés[10] to stakeholders with the aim to foster transformation of housing as well as challenge the cities' approach to "integration". The second Policy Café gave rise to the foundation of two working groups, "Together we are strong" and "Pro-Unicenter," to achieve these goals. Each group has a slightly different focus. "Pro-Unicenter" consists of representatives of the tenants' association Bochum e.V., of the Municipal Integration Centre Bochum, the civil society organisation "City for All", local politicians and the City Lab. Its aim is to envision a revitalised Uni-Center as a place where it is worthwhile for residents to live. It addresses residents, civil society initiatives and business people with the involvement of local politics as the decisive actor, the administration as the implementing actor and the tenants' association as the legal advisor. So far, the working group has carried out a city tour, the organisation of a summer festival in the Uni-Center and plans a neighbourhood tour with the secretary of state of the ministry for housing North Rhine-Westphalia. One of the project findings showed that homeland experiences with repressive political systems combined with uncertainties due to unfamiliarity with and structural

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[9] The EMPOWER project was financed by JPI Europe and coordinated by Simon Pemberton, University of Keele, UK. The country leads were Christiane Falge, University of Applied Sciences Bochum, Lisa Goodson, University of Birmingham UK, Gabriella Elgenius, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The project report can be accessed here: https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/79238

[10] Policy café: organized meetings of community researchers, academics, politicians and local stakeholders with the aim to reduce inequity by engaging communities into policy-making.

discrimination of the German political system have created in many communities of the neighbourhood a reluctance to engage in resistance practices that prevents people from political engagement against poor housing conditions. This was not the case among empowered community researchers as the working groups motivated them to be involved in forms of protest, as will be shown by the activities in the second working group "Together we are strong", a group that is made up of "Right to the City "-activists, tenants, the tenants' association Bochum e.V. and the City Lab with ten community researchers.

"Together we are strong" held a total of 20 meetings between October 2022 and August 2023 and various activities were carried out to mobilise tenants. A protest organized in March 2023 received not only media attention but also constituted a "trigger moment" in the way it mobilised community researchers to enforce their engagement for better housing. Community Researcher Sabine, together with her teenage-child, participated in a nation-wide demonstration against profit-making through housing. The group started to conduct door-to-door talks, where they were shown tenants' deteriorated housing conditions and invited the tenants to the monthly meetings of the working group. As a result of this door-to-door mobilisation, tenant meetings were held in the premises of the Protestant Church on site, which were made available free of charge. A total of four tenant meetings were held, which were initially attended by 50, then 30, 20 and finally eight tenants. Due to the low level of tenant participation, the working group activities were initially discontinued at the end of August 2023. It was agreed that as soon as a minimum of ten tenants join forces, the working group will become active again.

This notable decline in attendance had several reasons. One of the structural problems was that the group relied on a voluntary community organiser with limited time while professional community organising strategies for recruitment and retention of leader participation were definitely lacking. The experience with the failed mobilisation of the neighbourhood in the longer term was reflected on together with the community researchers who commented as follows:

> *Elham: With the EMPOWER project, that was once, we had the City-for-All, Christiane was with us, the neighbourhood researchers, we did a lot for the people. But the people weren't active. They just need someone to fight for them. But that doesn't play well together.*
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> *Iman: Yes, people don't understand that.*
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> *Elham: We fight for the people. But the people alone, they sit around and just watch. We can't do that. People also have to fight for their problems, fight for their rights. I don't think people are doing that. We said they're afraid, maybe?*
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> *Iman: In our countries, we are not allowed to say anything about our rights. We are afraid. If I say it's not good, I'll go to prison. We are not allowed to say anything against the government. That is all. When we go into offices, we have to say everything is OK. We are not allowed to say what we want. We are not allowed to. We are afraid of deportation. Germans too. They are afraid. Even with the German passport, they say that if I say something, they'll take it away again and deport me to my home country. Me too, I'm afraid. That I think, we foreigners, we can't change anything. That's our problem. ...*

> *Nahera: This means that if we want to change something in Hustadt, we first have to inform the citizens, the people, about their rights. So that they are not afraid. Because if they know their rights, then they can change something directly with us.*

The failed mobilisation by the Working Group "Together we are strong," which was carried out exclusively on a voluntary basis, shows that significantly more resources and, above all, a structural anchoring in the social institutions in the district are needed to effectively counter the "absence of political activism" grounded in peoples' fears (of deportation, legal consequences) and precarious living and working conditions leaving little space for political activism among the tenants. At the same time, the activities conducted by the CRs show the significant potential of empowered community researchers for local transformations.

City Labs and Community Organising: A Discussion of Differences and Commonalities

Although city Labs and Community Organising have different starting points and find their concrete realization in different ways, yet we see similar goals and effects. In the following discussion, we compare the two approaches in more detail regarding structural conditions, the meaning and role of power, knowledge production and hierarchies, the aspect of relationships and the question of strategy and tactics.

Starting Points and Structural Conditions

In community organising the community organiser (or an initial action group) searches for a field of action, a specific location, neighbourhood and/or a specific group of people. The organiser is in a teacher-guide role and dedicates most of his/her time in engaging people (Minkler 2012, 71f). With the same concern to dedicate their own work to improving the living conditions of people and groups affected by health and social inequity, academically trained people initiated the City Lab in the marginalised and stigmatized neighbourhood of Bochum Hustadt. But there is one big difference already in the beginning: while the community organiser is free to generate the relevant topics from the field together with the people (e.g. neighbours), the City Lab right from the start depends on fund-raising and respectively has to deal with the tension between ambition and reality when it comes to selecting and defining research topics. Although in participatory research the research topics should ideally emerge from the communities, in areas with no permanent funding for PAR the only way to acquire funds for research (including payment for CRs) is to address funding calls. We try to resolve this contradiction by applying for initial research projects with as broad a thematic focus as possible, so that it is possible to focus on the needs of the community in the further process of collaboration. An initial research project with topics that are of general relevance to the neighbourhood (e.g. the need for preventative health services) is used to put together a core group of neighbourhood researchers. Unlike community organising, the aim here is not to identify and involve key people (Szynka & Müller 2023, Richter 2022: 204f), but to represent the existing diversity in the neighbourhood as far as possible to make multiple voices and experiences audible (Martinson & Su 2012). Community researchers often only become spokesperson through a process of professionalisation during the research process and increasingly take on a central function for their community.

The Meaning of Knowledge and Knowledge Production

Although in community organising the focus is laid on the organising process itself and on political participation, Szynka and Müller (2023) point out the importance of local knowledge for community organising as well:

> *"It is no less important to note that neighbourhoods, districts and stakeholder groups etc. have their own traditions and histories - official and unofficial. That is why it is*

> *important in CO to know the habits, experiences, customs, values, etc. of a community, because building a citizens' organisation realistically starts with what is found." (Szynka & Müller 2023, own translation)*

The City Lab choses another way. We consider Alinsky's dictum "convert the plight into a problem" (Alinsky 1971, 119) as an inherent call for knowledge production and analysis. Here research and knowledge production are not mainly carried out with an instrumental interest in making CO as successfully as possible. Our work is based on the assumption that insufficient, silenced and hierarchised knowledge plays a central role in the creation and maintenance of social and health inequities in our society. This is why the City Lab makes knowledge production the core of its activities with strong references to Critical Engaged Anthropology. The "unique contribution" of this discipline for understanding society from a power- and structure-critical perspective lays in its "focus on the microsocial situation framed by macroeconomic and political forces; its examination of the way social situations are made meaningful through discourse, symbols, and language; and its analysis of the small site's embeddedness in larger structures of power" (Low & Merry 2010: 204). A complex understanding of how our society works, even at an everyday level, supports the development of the ability to act in the context of intervention-linked research. In this sense the collaborative knowledge production[11] process applied in the City Lab is already an intervention.

In addition, the diverse composition of the CR group diversifies local knowledge. Instead of being dependent on key individuals with gatekeeper functions, we diversify the perspectives/local knowledge/community knowledge through CR. This requires the academics involved to be sensitive when handling information and data. Not everything that would be interesting from a scientific perspective can or should be published (see Betscher 2019). Participatory exchange processes and sustainable relationships are the best way to fulfil the primary ethical obligation to "do no harm" (AAA no date) and to avoid data extractivism.

The Meaning of Power

Since collaborative knowledge production and subsequent development of (political) interventions stand in the centre of the City Lab, we first focus on the connection between knowledge, knowledge production and power. The more we are willing to understand the transcultural reality of our society, the more necessary it is to also understand the power mechanisms that lead to silencing of (non-western) forms of knowledges and to create spaces where these other knowledges can find expressions to build up narrative power. With the help of the concept of narrative power (Haapanen et al. 2023), it becomes possible to understand the interpenetration and interaction between the private, public, individual and collective levels:

We see how knowledge production can strengthen narrative power, that aims to "resist dominant societal narratives while promoting alternative public narratives focused on shared values and hope for a better future." (Haapanen et al. 2023:1) The collaborative research adds an empirical basis to individual and collective experiences and helps to create new narratives. Collective empowerment is gained through the creation of public visibility of marginalised knowledge (universities serve as amplifiers here), the development of speaker positions and the establishing of local and cross-city peer-networks of community researchers. Practicing public speaking e.g. presenting research findings in (activist) conferences increases self-esteem of the community researchers and thereby strengthens individual people's power at the same time.

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[11] Colloborative knowledge production includes the combination of academic and community knowledge.

On the levels of political power, we have to be honest regarding the limitations. Although community researchers are more and more included in local political settings, we have to bear in mind, what Labonté points out: "local decision making can be only within narrow parameters at best and is unlikely to include substantial control over economic resources" (Labonté 2012: 99). Nevertheless, we can at least see some success in building up governing power in the fact, that community researchers get in contact with politicians and were able to highlight the importance of getting the neighbourhood more involved in decision making processes. Here stronger and more systematic reciprocal references between community research and community organising could be fruitful (see below).

An important third dimension of power analysis within the City Lab context refers to the interpersonal level and ourselves, which means to constantly reflect on the power inequities within our group. Although we have work together for nearly five years now and built strong relations and friendships, the imbalances between Falge and Betscher as German white professors with high income lifetime public employment and community researchers persist.

> *"There are limits for us. Sometimes it's so hard to cross those boundaries. Maybe in that space, as you both say, that maybe we put that boundary to one side a little bit. Despite that inequality, that we create a space where you can speak your mind, speak from the heart, what you COULD change. I believe that change takes a lot of time in research. Even over 10 years, I don't think you can do it. And yet there is a time when we say we'll start." (Dilbuhar)*

The Meaning of Relationships

In community organising, there is a broad spectrum of different views on the role and importance of interpersonal relationships, ranging from the explicit and conceptual rejection of personal relationships in favour of public (and supposedly more stable) relationships (Szynka & Müller 2023) to feminist perspectives such as "midwives for power" that refuses the private-public-sphere-distinction and emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships and networks as the basis of community organising (Piñeros Shields 2019). In the City Lab we deliberately question and blur the public-private boundaries. Although doing research in academic settings is at least semi-public and it is always necessary to keep the gates open for new perspectives and community researchers to join in, personal relationships based on dialogue in the Freirean sense play a crucial role. According to Freire, five prerequisites build the foundations of dialogue: love of humanity, humility in the sense of a non-hierarchical concept of knowledge, faith and hope in people's ability to create something new (to transform the world) and finally the fundamental ability to generate critical thinking through dialogue.[12] The constant orientation towards these Freirean principles helps us to counteract the hierarchisation of different forms of knowledge, to build attitudes at eye level, to reflect on power inequalities and to enable transformation through the community.

> *"He has described well what a dialogue means. Many people do a lot of dialogue with each other. But nevertheless, for example, the person sitting opposite him, who is also trying to impose his opinion on the other person. 'You should do that'. But that's not what dialogue means. If I have a dialogue with others, I have to believe in them, in their opinion, in their knowledge. If I love someone, then I give the person space to express his/hr opinion. Maybe what he/she says is more important than my knowledge. As you and Christiane say, maybe some of the knowledge from communities is more important*

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[12] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Paulo Freire. trans. Myra Ramos. 2005. Continuum.(pg. 88 and 89)

than what you learn in schools, because that's the practical knowledge here. I thought it was very good what he summarised under dialogue, faith and hope." (Dilbuhar)

While in Dilbuhar's statement the importance of non-hierarchical assessments of different forms of knowledge is highlighted as a particular value of our dialogue, Nahera emphasises the belief and possibility of transformation:

"You believed in us, that we could achieve something. And over time, of course, we achieved a lot. And when I think, as Christiane said, when I think how I was five years ago, for example, not how I am now. So, there are a lot of important things. I feel that Freire is talking to us. Yes, there are many things. Even with critical thoughts. For example, one says an idea, the other doesn't agree. But our goals are to create something good in our community that also suits us." (Nahera)

These foundations of dialogue are applied in various shared digital and analogous spaces: They take form in planned or accidental, public or non-public meetings in Hustadt, in digital meetings, at conferences or during protest activities, as well as in continuous contact via messenger services. In combination with Falges' residence in Hustadt and unplanned, coincidental everyday encounters beyond any agenda, these spaces can lead to transformation. It is from these spaces that the different shoots of the rhizome sprout emerge.

The Meaning of Strategy and Tactics

As shown on the example of the EMPOWER-project, the shift from intervention-linked community research as promoted by the City Lab to community mobilisation and organising is difficult. Here the City Lab could learn from the intense discussions on strategies and tactics developed in the context of community organising including the question whether the work has a more affirmative or transformative character (Maruschke 2014), which in our field means to add community perspectives to the existing system of health care (affirmative) or to try to develop new community based structures (transformative). The latter has so far been underdeveloped in the German context, reflecting German society's refusal to recognise its status as immigration country and diversity for decades. An honest reflection on the work of the City Lab shows that it follows both, affirmative and transformative approaches. On the one hand, we try to organise success through realisable interventions within the existing system. At the same time, we aim for collective action to address social determinants of health which includes to combat structural inequity. One of the main concerns of transformative approaches is not to leave people's problems on a small scale, but to link them to larger political issues in order to promote transformation. Due to the interconnection between educational elements, data collection, interpretation and comparison in the City Lab, we make larger topics and structural causes of inequity visible and addressable. The data collected provides certainty on the side of the community researchers that we can substantiate claims for change based on evidence. Data collection in the City Lab is a crucial strategy, whereas organising people is the strategic focus of community organising. This means, that community research in City Labs does not itself focus on broad-based grassroots work, but can build structures of solidarity and trust through the research process that can then be used by community researchers for grassroots work in their neighbourhoods. Nahera, one of the CR describes the organising effects of the City Lab compared to other offers of local institutions:

"For me, the difference is that the other organisations sit down and say, ok, we'll make this offer. Without asking the people. And I've been there several times. There are lots of programmes that don't work. Once or twice with one or two people. Then that's it. Your work or our work is something completely different. We talk to people, we know where

> *the problems are. I think it's good when we create a space together where everyone can tell us their problem and we find a solution together." (Nahera)*

Dilbuhar, another community researcher from the City Lab argues that community research needs to be complemented by community organizing in order to be transformative.

> *"I believe this is because each of us has learned and experienced this in our home country. Every change takes a long time, in politics, on the street. I think everyone knows that. You can't expect that through research, which we, the people here in Hustadt, were able to do, that we will directly impress the landlord so much that he will come and make all the flats right. We understand that. But we people always have hope and we say, maybe it could be better. But if you think about it a bit, you realise that these things take a lot of time. A lot of patience, a lot of courage, a lot of cohesion. That you become more like "City for All". You can't make a direct change through research. After research, I can't say, ah, Christiane or Silke, they're saying something that's impossible. I know that's sometimes impossible. But nevertheless, you should talk about it more often, write articles more often, get in touch with communities so that you can find out more." (Dilbuhar)*

Conclusion: A Call to Interconnect Both Approaches More Systematically

Finally, we would like to return to the general distinction made by Christens, Gupta, and Speer (2021) between community organising and Participatory Action Research/Community Based Participatory Research. Christen et al. emphasize that the biggest difference lies in the role of the persons involved: in PAR/CBPR, the participants were "more akin to consumers who are often guided through execution of serial activities designed by staff or experts and where fidelity to a curriculum or to procedures designed by others is viewed as critical for successful outcomes" (Christen et al. 2021: 3004). Although, during the initial phase of City Lab, this distinction still applies, we have shown, that this is only true for the beginning. The City Lab as a permanent structure makes it possible for the CR and the academics to develop new roles and subject positions and to negotiate these consistently with regard to different access to power, knowledge and privileges. Therefore, we argue that if we leave project based participatory research behind and build sustainable, long-term organizational structures and personal relationships in form of City Labs like in Bochum-Hustadt, the overlaps to Community Organising become clear. Furthermore, if both approaches are interlinked more closely the full potential of mutual benefits can be addressed more systematically:

The City Lab Bochum-Hustadt shows how it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of different biographical, cultural and country-of-origin as well as country-of-arrival-related approaches and obstacles to engagement through ongoing joint collaboration and research. In this way, it is possible to involve people from multi-diverse communities who are often perceived as hard-to-reach. This aspect is particularly relevant for the German context, in which citizen platforms and organisations are not uncommonly dominated by white (male) Germans. Community organising could become more successful if professional community organisers would work together with community researchers and learn more from their community relation and knowledge about the many reasons why people (esp. migrants in Germany) are reluctant to get involved in civil disobedience. And community organising could adjust the process of developing speaker's position to the methodologies developed by community researchers.

On the other hand, the example of EMPOWER has shown that the resources and competencies of professional community organisers were lacking here. In the future, integrating community organising methods into our approach just as systematically as research could help to overcome

disappointing experiences of a neighbourhood that can hardly be activated and organize political intervention and success more targeted. Even if we have not yet found comprehensive solutions for the challenges that arise in the transition from financially compensated co-research to voluntary community organising, we will use the mutual enrichment of both approaches by interlinking them more closely in our work in the City Lab in the future.

This also means to build new structures that strengthen the triad of academia, CSOs and NGOs (including community organisers), health care and communities at an organisational and institutional level to work towards the call for community-based, social and health equity-oriented care (WHO). In order to put this into action we are currently working on establishing new structures of Community Based Health Care in Bochum and Hamburg: in Bochum the City Lab and the community researchers play a central role in the attempt to set up a multi-professional Community Health Centre. Vice versa, in Hamburg, the multiprofessional community health centre Poliklink Veddel already exists (including primary health care, counselling and community worker). Here we are establishing a City Lab as a cooperation between the Poliklinik Veddel and the University of Applied Science Hamburg (HAW) for community research to become an integral participatory component of multiprofessional care for community health. This gives us the chance to link our research activities closely to the community organiser who is part of the Poliklinik team already. The basis is already laid with Germany's first participatory Community Health Survey "Veddel wie geht's?"/ "Veddel how are you?" and a follow up qualitative research project on housing. For two years we have had a continuous exchange between community researchers from Bochum and Hamburg, that shows the importance of the formation of peer networks, especially for the community organising aspect of our work. Recognizing similar situations in completely different places and compare individual and local problems in different areas helps to understand structural causes of inequity and their linkages with social inequity such as racial capitalism. Based on this, we are widening our network internationally one of our future visions is the establishment of a Community Health Hub Academy for community-based and community-research related knowledge transfer and in which the strengthening of community researcher's peer networks and the linkages between City Labs and community organising would play a central role.

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