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Who Is ‘All’?
Target Groups and Accessibility in the Viennese Place-Based Organisation *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*

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Abstract

Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (GB*) is a Viennese organisation engaged in place-based community work. Originally the domain of engineers, planners, and architects, GB*'s teams have, since the 2000s, also included social workers and other professionals. Drawing on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, I ask: What enables access to GB* and what hinders it? Who remains excluded? This article presents findings from an institutional ethnographic study involving *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* and intra-EU migrant-origin families with children, conducted between October 2020 and February 2022. I contend that the stated objective of engaging 'all' residents within each designated area, with no further distinction, may paradoxically undermine accessibility. Three dimensions of GB*'s accessibility are analysed, which include: the reduction in the number of physical sites and the corresponding increase in workload over time; three competing ideal-typical conceptions of the role identified among practitioners (technical, social work orientated, and political approaches); and the exclusion of children and intra-EU migrants from the organisation's target groups.

Keywords: Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, accessibility, target groups, Capability Approach, space

Zusammenfassung

Die *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* (GB*) betreibt gemeinwesenorientierte Stadtteilarbeit in Wien. Die ursprünglich aus Ingenieur:innen, Planer:innen und Architekt:innen zusammengesetzten Teams wurden ab den 2000er Jahren um Sozialarbeiter:innen und weitere Berufsgruppen erweitert. Ausgehend von Amartya Sens Befähigungsansatz frage ich, was den Zugang zur GB* erleichtert bzw. erschwert und wer möglicherweise ausgeschlossen bleibt. Die Antworten darauf basieren auf einer ethnografischen Studie mit der *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* sowie mit Familien mit EU-Migrationshintergrund und Kindern, die zwischen Oktober 2020 und Februar 2022 durchgeführt wurde. Im Beitrag wird gezeigt, dass das erklärte Ziel, ‚alle' Bewohner:innen eines Mandatsgebiets unterschiedslos anzusprechen, paradoxerweise die Zugänglichkeit einschränken kann. Dies wird mit Blick auf drei Aspekte der Zugänglichkeit der GB* gezeigt: die Reduktion der Standorte und die damit verbundene Zunahme der Arbeitsbelastung; konkurrierende Arbeitsverständnisse der Praktiker:innen sowie der Ausschluss von Kindern und EU-Migrant:innen aus den definierten Zielgruppen.

Schlagworte: Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung, Zugänglichkeit, Zielgruppen, Befähigungsansatz, Raum

1 Introduction

Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (GB*) is a place-based organisation responsible for improving the quality of public space and fostering neighbourly relations across all Viennese districts. It operates under the authority of Municipal Department 25 of the City of Vienna for Technical Urban Renewal, which commissions its work through public tenders awarded to private contractors – such as architectural, engineering, and communication firms – as well as to social welfare organisations including Caritas. The main functions of GB* are to:

- Inform inhabitants about their neighbourhoods, local spaces, and available services;
- Provide free legal consultancy on private rental issues;
- Organise events to strengthen neighbourly relations;
- Moderate participatory planning processes and communicate their outcomes;
- Encourage inhabitants to engage in self-help and participate in neighbourhood life;
- Support greening initiatives and other interventions to address climate change.

Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung serves as a bridging organisation. Vertically, it channels information from local authorities to residents and relays residents' perspectives to district administrations. Horizontally, it fosters and sustains neighbourhood-based networks through community engagement. The structural conditions of GB*'s work – namely, the borders and size of each mandated area, as well as the composition and scale of its teams – are determined by the City of Vienna through competitive tendering based on market principles at the conclusion of each mandate, which lasts between three and six years.

At the time of the fieldwork (October 2020–February 2022), GB* operated across the entire Viennese urban area with five teams, each responsible for between two and six districts. Engagement with residents occurred primarily through five neighbourhood centres (Grätzelzentren) and ten neighbourhood management points (Stadtteilmanagements). The latter, established from the 2010s onwards, are situated in urban expansion areas or in older districts undergoing urban renewal. Officially, each team is responsible for all inhabitants within its jurisdiction.

Founded in Vienna in the 1970s to support the policy of soft urban renewal (sanfte Stadterneuerung), GB*'s initial remit was technical, with a focus on housing.[i] Over time, this was expanded to include public space. In the 2000s, as Vienna's population grew larger and became more diverse, the professional profiles within the GB* teams also became more varied. Alongside engineers, urban planners, and architects, teams began to include social workers, sociologists, psychologists, educational scientists, and other professionals.

At its peak in the 1990s, GB* operated 20 physical sites, including a mobile team – almost as

many as the city's districts. However, between 2012 and 2018, its sites were reduced by more than half (from twelve to five), resulting in the areas under their remit expanding. This political decision has received limited attention in public debate or academic literature, with only a few exceptions (cf. Kirsch-Soriano da Silva/Stoik 2012; Sommer 1991: 35–36).

> "In the face of the numerous interdisciplinary tasks that *Gebietsbetreuungen* currently undertake or are expected to undertake, it is even questionable whether the instrument has by now become overloaded with unfulfillable and unrealistic expectations, and whether it is possible to cope with the extensive responsibilities using the available resources."[ii] (Stoik/Kirsch-Soriano da Silva 2012)

> "The comprehensive mandate leads the institutions themselves to set focal points depending on the conditions and possibilities in the district, and results in the absence of a uniform competence profile." (Haller 2004: 29)

Christoph Stoik critically examines the economisation of community work in Vienna, arguing that precarious public financing mechanisms steer such work towards efficiency and measurable impact – hallmarks of the capitalist system – as well as political compliance, rather than towards emancipatory approaches (cf. Stoik 2018: 77). In this context, social work risks becoming a legitimising instrument for meeting formal quality standards, to the detriment of its intended beneficiaries (cf. Stoik 2018: 81). Prior to this, the evaluation of the neighbourhood management (Grätzelmanagement) project by GB* Mitte (cf. GB* 2007) had highlighted the need for additional personnel and for smaller, more manageable areas that are "seeable at a glance" in order to engage with migrants and other hard-to-reach groups through low-threshold formats.

Given these developments, this article poses the following questions: What enables access to *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, and what hinders it? Are any categories of residents excluded? The central argument I advance here is that the indiscriminate aim of addressing "all" inhabitants within a mandated area may inadvertently reproduce existing power dynamics, thus reinforcing disadvantage. To make the organisation more inclusive, enabling, and empowering, I advocate a structured reflection on its target groups and accessibility. As a Swedish study on the organisational structure of social services has shown, strongly integrated models – characterised by a generalist orientation and the absence of clearly defined target groups – tend to marginalise the perspectives of less powerful categories, including children (cf. Grell/Blom/Ahmadi 2022).

In the following sections, I propose adopting the Capability Approach as a framework for reflecting on urban institutions and organisation, and I present the methods of the study on which this article is based. The main focus of the article is the presentation of three distinct ideal-typical conceptions of the role identified among practitioners, followed by a critical analysis of the target groups caught within the tension between the ideal of objective inclusivity and the practical realities of everyday practice.

2 The Capability Approach and Accessibility in *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*

The Capability Approach, developed by economist Amartya Sen (1985, 1992, 1993) and philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2011), has prompted sociologically orientated urban studies to consider which categories of people are able to access and utilize urban infrastructures and services, if they wish to, and how and under what circumstances this is possible. Scholars applying this approach in quality-of-life research have criticised the mere quantification of infrastructures and services in cities (cf. Blečić/Cecchini/Talu 2013), instead emphasising the significance of physical dimensions of accessibility, such as spatial and temporal arrangements and mobility, particularly in large urban contexts (cf. Nuvolati 2009).

In this article, I adopt the Capability Approach as a theoretical lens through which to examine the accessibility of the organisation *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* and its target groups. GB* provides information and services that facilitate access to spaces, services, organisations, and institutions. In doing so, it supports the realisation of urban capabilities, such as securing adequate housing conditions and accessing spaces and opportunities for sociability. I therefore propose conceptualising GB* as an urban conversion factor in the sense of the Capability Approach.

'Niederschwelligkeit' (literally "low threshold"), translated here as "accessibility", is a deliberate strategy pursued by GB* to reach as many inhabitants as possible, including those with fewer resources and competences (cf. SRZ Stadt + Regionalforschung Gmbh/Feigelfeld 2000: e–III). This is achieved by removing barriers – linguistic, educational, gender-related, and others – to guarantee inhabitants "substantial freedom" to access services provided by GB*, participate, and become active in their neighbourhoods with relative ease. To this end, these services and events are generally free of charge, require no registration, and are offered at various times of the day. Nonetheless, evaluations of past projects have indicated that further improvements are needed, particularly in reaching people with a migration background and lower levels of education (cf. Kirsch-Soriano da Silva 2013: 10-6). Language emerges as a crucial conversion factor that mediates access to opportunities, as demonstrated by the GB*'s Grätzeleltern (Neighbourhood Parents) project, conducted

in collaboration with Caritas (ibid.). Evidence also suggests that the presence of employees with a migration background can enhance accessibility for residents with similar backgrounds, even when their countries of origin and mother tongues differ (cf. GB* 2007). On this basis, I argue that employing more staff with migrant backgrounds could improve the accessibility of GB*, much like teachers with migrant backgrounds have been shown to support inclusion in schools. In both neighbourhood centres and schools, staff diversity that reflects the multifariousness of users fosters communication and the emergence of role models (cf. Cavaliere 2019: 106).

3 Methods

The empirical material presented in this article derives from a study on the quality of life in Viennese neighbourhoods, conducted with intra-EU migrant-origin families with children and with *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* between October 2020 and February 2022. Adopting an institutional ethnographic approach, my focus lay in examining what GB* employees did, the meanings and explanations they attributed to their activities, and the mapping of power relations (cf. Billo/Mountz 2016). Institutional ethnography generates the situated knowledge of institutions by assembling complementary perspectives, including those of individuals working within and alongside them, as well as those affected by them, such as clients or beneficiaries. This entails investigating the activities of individuals who are unacquainted and do not interact face-to-face, often across multiple sites (cf. Smith 2005: 16). Geographers have endorsed multi-sited ethnographies that emphasise the socio-spatial analysis of institutions and the areas for which they are accountable.

In this study, the two groups of research participants – families and GB* practitioners – occupied complementary positions but did not know each other. The research methods I employed included semi-structured expert interviews (ten interviews with eleven individuals working across all five GB* sites) and participant observation of events organised by GB*. In addition, I undertook a five-week internship at GB* Mitte (October–November 2021), whose Neighbourhood Management project (2002–2006) was the first to complement GB*'s technical orientation with concepts from social and community work, such as activation, participation, and networking (cf. GB* 2007). During the internship, – through observation, conversation, and active participation in daily work from within – I sought to grasp the 'working knowledge' (cf. Devault 2006; Smith 2005) of different professionals and the institutional culture as an ongoing practice. As a non-Austrian and a newcomer to Vienna my externality to the field may have helped me avoid institutional capture – that is, the tendency of individuals working in institutions and organisations to speak and act uniformly once they have internalised the institutional language and culture. According to Dorothy Smith, the

founder of institutional ethnography, research should function like a map: informing participants of their current position and guiding them in planning their next goals and the path to achieving them.

4 Physical Presence in the Local Area

The findings of this study point to physical presence in the local area as being a key factor affecting access to *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung* and its services. In my book *Capabilities, Learning, and Urban Quality of Life – Mobile European Families in Vienna*, I examine how the spatial dimension of GB*'s accessibility is configured in everyday practice, analysing the outdoor areas of the GB* Mitte neighbourhood centre which have been deliberately designed and maintained to attract residents and foster interaction (cf. Cavaliere 2025: 247–248). Interactions in physical space are particularly important for reaching digitally disengaged individuals, who are disproportionately represented among older populations and those with lower levels of education. By contrast, digitally literate and educated residents are more capable and motivated to access information via official communication channels (e.g. the GB* website or newsletter), which enables them to participate even if they live further away. In this regard, the same principle applies as in adult and continuing education: the density of services, organisations, and institutions within a given neighbourhood or region, combined with ease of access, can substantially increase participation among socially disadvantaged categories who are otherwise difficult to reach (cf. Baur/Stöhr/Sixt 2015: 131). To engage disadvantaged groups who are typically "at home outdoors" (Interview with GB*4) and to extend its visibility beyond the immediate vicinity of neighbourhood centres, GB* also employs the outreach format going out, which was reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the critical importance of the physical components of accessibility outlined above, the progressive deterioration of structural working conditions – particularly the ratio between working hours and the size of the areas to be covered – has had a marked impact on GB*'s work. At the time of the fieldwork, the least populated area under a GB* team's responsibility comprised approximately 285,000 inhabitants, while the most populated area numbered around 490,000. Seven out of eleven interviewees perceived working hours to be a scarce resource, whereas most participants considered the financial resources provided by the City of Vienna for material costs to be largely sufficient.

> "I would say that it has become harder in the last few years. […] For comparison, [with regard to] our mandated area in Vienna – we like to say we are responsible for the second biggest city in Austria, because the districts we oversee have in total about 500,000 inhabitants." (Interview with GB*8)

> "The money and material resources such as offices and so on, they're all ok, aren't they? What makes it hard are these huge areas. I think it's a challenge to keep the overview and always to be up to date – a big one I would say." (Interview with GB*1)

During annual planning sessions, I observed that every working hour at GB* was scheduled, recorded, and potentially subject to evaluation. Nevertheless, the actual workload may have exceeded what was documented, since – as previously noted – the relational and informal aspects of GB*'s work are only partially quantifiable (cf. SRZ Stadt + Regionalforschung Gmbh/Feigelfeld 2000: 2–8). Furthermore, the reduction in personnel resulting from the declining number of GB* sites deprived the organisation of professional expertise and competences, as well as of local networks with individuals, organisations, and institutions.

5 Three Ideal-Typical Conceptions of the Job

At the time of the fieldwork, GB*'s teams comprised between twelve and 19 members, with a predominance of technical profiles (architects, engineers, and planners), but also including social workers, sociologists, and other professionals. The comprehensive mandate afforded practitioners considerable scope for personal interpretation, shaped by their competences and interests. Based on my analysis of the research material, I developed three ideal-typical categories reflecting how the mandate and the work were conceptualised – namely, a technical, a social work-orientated, and a political approach – along the dimensions of disciplinary orientation, focus, and target groups. These are summarised in Table 1.

Category	Disciplinary Orientation	Focus	Target(s)	Conception of Quality of Life	Prevalence in GB*
Technical Approach	Architecture, engineering, planning	Public space; free-market competitiveness; emphasis on tangible outputs (e.g. maps, renderings, reports, external communication)	Local administrations and politics	Dependent on the quality of public space and the efforts of professionals managing it	Hegemonic

Social work-orientated approach	Social sciences, especially social work	Inhabitants in the space; working for and with people to promote participation, empowerment, and self-help; re-elaboration of the tradition of Red Vienna[iii] in a less paternalistic way	'All' inhabitants?	As a product of neighbourly relationships and institutional networking	Competing
Political approach	Law, social work	The foundational right to housing; welfare-orientated conception of the role	Disadvantaged categories	Dependent on housing conditions	Minoritarian and less recognised[iv]

Table 1: Overview of ideal-typical conceptions of the GB role*

The empirical fieldwork revealed the interwoven nature of different aspects of the job, while also exposing the competition for resources and recognition – in Bourdieusian terms, economic and symbolic capital. The difficulties described in the previous section reinforced feelings of individualisation and distance between team members with differing conceptions of the organisation's role. At the time of the fieldwork, GB* Mitte was managed by an engineering firm that sought to succeed in the market while simultaneously delivering a public service for "everyone", as commissioned by the City of Vienna. This contradictory situation contributed to divergent interpretations of the role and the workplace: was it a neighbourhood centre or an office? Such differences led to disputes, often with a spatial dimension. For instance, were inhabitants permitted to enter the office, or was it reserved exclusively for GB*'s employees? At the Neighbourhood Management office near Northwest Station, run by the same team as GB* Mitte, the social worker stationed at the entrance was responsible for public contact, while other team members worked in the back without company telephones. This arrangement may have accentuated the technical nature of their work and may explain why they referred to inhabitants as "customers" (ethnographic log, 14 October 2021).

The Ladies Cafe (Frauencafé) is a weekly event organised by GB* Mitte, where women with diverse backgrounds in terms of migration, age, health status, and socio-cultural position – predominantly residents of the neighbourhood – meet, exchange experiences, and engage in activities aligned with the theme of the meeting (during my internship, these included, among others, Syrian

dances and body percussion). The research revealed that the Ladies Cafe implicitly prompted the emergence of foundational problems related to participants' lifeworlds, along with efforts to address them. For example, the meeting on Syrian dances became an occasion to provide educational advice to a teenager of Syrian origin and her mother. As a socially orientated format, the Ladies Cafe therefore falls into the second category I proposed. However, colleagues from GB* in the adjacent office and nearby residents occasionally felt disturbed by the noise from the workshops. In response to colleagues who did not acknowledge the Ladies Cafe as being consistent with GB*'s mandate, the organisers defended the need to employ languages beyond the purely verbal so as to avoid selection based on cultural level or migration background. The main organiser of the Ladies Cafe noted, "It is only those who are there who know what comes with it, what it brings", going on to observe that in the eyes of those not involved it is "equated with coffee and cake" (ethnographic log, 14 October 2021).

More generally, to be accessible GB* events should be enjoyable to go to while also providing opportunities to address foundational and existential issues. Becoming familiar with employees through such events reduces inhibitions about approaching GB* in times of need – for example, regarding housing or social work services (the latter being only partially within GB*'s remit, but in practice integrated into the role).

> "But these [fun] events are meant to welcome people and are simply EASY to take part in – [the organisation of] a cafe or cooking together or similar things – but through these events you can clarify a lot of questions, pass on a lot of knowledge, and also make a lot of exchange possible among people […]." (Interview with GB*4)

The housing consultant at GB* Mitte exemplified the third category. During my internship, most incoming phone calls concerned free consultancy on housing. Working part-time, she struggled to meet demand and felt professionally isolated and insufficiently recognised by her team. Considering the sharp rise in rental housing prices in Vienna – a phenomenon that raises the question of whether Vienna remains a just city (cf. Kazepov/Verwiebe 2022) – she argued that participation in GB* greening initiatives and participatory planning projects was a luxury inaccessible to socio-economically weaker groups (ethnographic log, 12 October 2021). Housing consultancy, once GB*'s core task, has been progressively marginalised. Four years earlier, GB* Mitte had employed two housing consultants, almost full-time, and had been responsible for only one district rather than six (ethnographic log, 2 November 2021).

In this section, I have demonstrated that the different fields of GB*'s work are complementary. I argue that competition risks dispersing energies and suggest that new functions should be built around the original core of the institution, rather than replacing it.

6 Target Groups in Theory and Practice

Each GB* site is formally responsible for all inhabitants living within its mandated area, with particular attention paid to vulnerable categories. Despite this universal remit, I argue that unfavourable structural conditions and insufficient consideration of the intended recipients may contribute to the (self-)selection of target groups. During the fieldwork, I observed that GB* practitioners often adopted an efficiency-orientated approach, focusing on feasibility and directing their efforts towards areas where they anticipated success and positive feedback. Personal relationships – whether informal or institutionalised into networks – as well as chance, influenced the spatial focus on certain neighbourhoods, the themes addressed, and the target groups for events and interventions. "This focus also partly depends on us. So, where we have good contacts, where there are things which we find interesting […]. It means that it also depends a bit on chance." (Interview with GB*8). The fact that efforts are not systematically directed towards the categories and areas where interventions are most needed reinforces both personal and territorial disadvantage.

> "So, there are also these pragmatic reasons: we become more active where we have had good experiences, where it's possible to cooperate well with other institutions and authorities. And this is actually indeed comprehensible, but for the inhabitants of these districts it is luck or unluck, they cannot do anything about it. […] It's actually not just, not fair, because we place the focal points not according to where would be the most important, but rather according to where we see more chances of success, chances to achieve something." (Interview with GB*8)

GB* practitioners frequently attributed the impossibility of reaching everyone to a lack of time. Qualified staff or volunteers with foreign language skills and intercultural competences were seen as potentially helpful in connecting with migrant communities.

> "Of course, we ask ourselves this question over and over [how can we reach out to disadvantaged groups?] […] But…you also need a lot of employees who approach people, that is the main point. In the ideal case, of course, also with a suitable mother tongue." (Interview with GB*9)

> "We recently recognised, in a workshop, that maybe we often rather address the same target group. […] Always unwittingly, we reach a bit always the same group, somehow. And we also noticed that maybe we should be more multilingual in our communication." (Interview with GB*6)

The data collected suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic heightened daily dilemmas regarding target groups, oscillating between broadening and diversifying participation through less time-consuming online formats on the one hand, and targeting disadvantaged categories of inhabitants on the other. For example, participation in the Ladies Cafe declined during the COVID-19 lockdowns, despite GB* offering training on how to use Zoom. I hypothesise that individuals with limited German language competences found the online format too wordy and lacking in holistic forms of interaction. At the same time, in an effort to reach vulnerable groups who might require foundational services provided by GB*, such as free rental consultancy, the organisation intensified its activities in public space (going-out formats).

Addressing the most locally bound categories is characteristic of *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, and families with children are among the strongest users of the neighbourhoods in which they live due to reduced mobility (cf. Karsten 2009: 321). GB* organises events and initiatives for children and families, such as toy rental schemes, thematic urban rallies, and participatory projects with schools. Nevertheless, it does not explicitly or programmatically focus on children and families. Only three out of the 16 intra-EU migrant families with children who participated in my study on quality of life were at least partially aware of GB*'s existence. I developed an analytical typology of four distinct ways GB* views and treats children: as abstract subjects situated at the intersection of institutional networks; as subjects or objects in tow; as multipliers and amplifiers of GB*'s visibility; as full inhabitants of the mandated areas (cf. Cavaliere 2025: 252–255). Only in the final category are children included as equal urban citizens in the supposedly universal target group that GB* strives to reach.

7 Discussion

The place-based organisation *Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung*, which aims to enhance the quality of life for all Viennese residents by improving public spaces and fostering neighbourly relations, can be understood as a potential urban conversion factor in the sense of the Capability Approach. The data presented in this article stem from an institutional ethnographic study based on interviews and participant observation. The study addresses the issues of accessibility and target groups,

prompting a critical examination of GB*'s everyday practices through the questions: For whom? With whom? How can accessibility be improved?

Analysis of the data reveals that inequalities in physical access to neighbourhood centres – shaped by distance and by personal motility, understood as the capability to be mobile – compound other forms of social inequality. Moreover, the findings indicate that the size of the mandated areas, an often-overlooked structural factor, strongly influences the daily work of GB* practitioners, orientating it towards feasibility rather than fairness. I therefore advocate urban policy reforms to improve the ratio between working hours and staffing levels on the one hand, and the size of the mandated areas on the other. Ideally, such reforms should be accompanied by efforts to reverse the current trend of economisation in Vienna's community work and to restore its emancipatory function for both individual and collective actors (cf. Stoik 2018: 83).

I reconstructed three distinct, and at times conflicting, interpretations of the role played by GB* practitioners, which influence the individuals and the groups they engage with – or overlook – in their practice. The different "souls" of GB*, rooted in its historical trajectory and the diversity of professional profiles within teams, may occasionally clash, particularly under conditions of limited time and workforce. I argue that such tensions risk weakening the organisation, and that maintaining both the "hard" and "soft" dimensions of quality of life – without neglecting GB*'s historical commitment to housing rights – is essential to fulfilling its mandate. This would align with Vienna's longstanding emphasis on the foundational economy: an everyday economy for people, centred on collectively relevant public infrastructure and committed to ensuring the fulfilment of fundamental rights for as many people as possible (cf. The Foundational Economy Collective 2018), a tradition dating back to Red Vienna. With the shift from paternalism to activation, facilitation, and scaffolding initiatives led by the inhabitants, and with the integration of social work elements since the 1990s, residents are no longer treated merely as recipients of GB*'s services but have assumed an active role in shaping them. I argue that, while this shift may offer pragmatic shortcuts in the face of time constraints, the modulation of GB*'s interventions should be guided primarily by the needs of its target groups, who are not a homogeneous mass and therefore require differentiated attention. I demonstrated that, although several GB* initiatives are taken up by families with children, the families in my sample and GB* itself had limited awareness of one another. Viewed through the lens of the Capability Approach, this finding highlights a gap between the existence of an offer on the one hand, and the effective possibility of making use of it on the other. For the organisation, recognising children as competent urban citizens may generate insights that extend to other categories of inhabitants, thereby contributing to more inclusive cities. Instrumental ways of viewing inhabitants

– including children – are remnants of a paternalistic, top-down mentality that no longer aligns with contemporary approaches to community-orientated neighbourhood work.

In this article, adopting a sociological and urban studies perspective, I have sought to offer GB* practitioners an opportunity to reflect on their work from an external vantage point. This also entails encouraging GB* employees to examine the implicit understanding of their roles and to engage in the intentional definition of their professional identities. I have offered impulses to urban policymakers (the City of Vienna) regarding the broader framework that enables and constrains the capabilities of GB*, which in turn can enhance the capabilities of inhabitants by acting as an institutional conversion factor in the sense of the Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen (1992) and Martha Nussbaum (2000). Finally, this article may serve as a stimulus for other place-based and community-based organisations and institutions across Europe to reflect on their accessibility and target groups.

Citations

i For an overview of the history and organisation of GB*, see SRZ Stadt + Regionalforschung GmbH/Feigelfeld (2000), Rechnungshof (2013), and Sommer (1991). For information on the number of teams over time, refer to the diagram provided by Rechnungshof (2013: 132).

ii Translation from German by the author.

iii Red Vienna (in German 'Rotes Wien') refers to the historical period from 1918 to 1934, during which the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria concentrated its political efforts in Vienna on affordable municipal housing and urban welfare – including education and healthcare – supporting residents in a paternalistic manner "from cradle to grave". Schools and childcare facilities, libraries, public swimming pools, and other recreational amenities were organised within or near municipal housing to reduce inequalities based on family background. Today, the Viennese public and third sectors continue to uphold the legacy of Red Vienna (cf. Konrad 2008).

iv This is surprising, given that it represents the historical core of GB* and the tradition of Red Vienna.

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