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Participating citizens in the development of future guiding principles
in Dachau

The present good practice report was developed from the cooperation with the Civil Engineering Department of the City of Dachau, in their role as a follower city in the SUITS project, for purposes of learning transfer and knowledge exchange.

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Date: February 2021

Introduction

Dachau is a town with 50,000 inhabitants and part of the Munich metropolitan region. The challenges Dachau is facing are linked to the topics of mobility, population growth, digitalisation, changes in the labour market, as well as climate change and biodiversity protection. For several years, the city of Dachau has used intensive citizen participation as a means of sustainable urban planning, especially in the area of mobility planning.

Participating citizens in the development of future guiding principles in Dachau

When it comes to the question - How should the city develop in the coming decades? - Dachau relies on public dialogue under the motto “Dachau thinks ahead”. In this way, the different interests of the various stakeholders should be considered at an early stage in the development of the urban development strategy and the preparation of the land use plan.

In a large-scale participation process, together with citizens, interest groups, experts and representatives of the city administration, guiding principles were developed which set the direction for future urban development in the major topic areas of nature, living, transport, business and urban design. Based on the strengths, problems and perspectives of the city, the guiding principles describe the future priorities and goals of urban development.

This is done using a holistic planning approach in which the topic of mobility is seen in interaction with other topic areas. The city has recognised that transport problems must always be considered and solved in conjunction with other areas, such as housing or commercial development.

The two-year participation process for the development of the city vision included the following milestones, which are examined in more detail in the following.

1. Kick-off
2. Participation offerings
3. Working groups to develop the guiding principles
4. Evaluation of the guiding principles (online)
5. Citizens' workshop
6. Finalisation of the guiding principles and adoption by the city council

Step 1: Kick-off

In order to define the expectations, goals and requirements for the development of the guiding principles, in a first step the 30 members of the city council met for a workshop. The aim of the workshop was to define priority areas for the further development of the vision. In addition, strengths and weaknesses, areas of potential and conflicts in Dachau, as well as possible solutions were presented and discussed in more detail. Afterwards, expert discussions were held with city administration staff from the various departments.

As a result, 10 focus areas were defined for the development of the vision: Mobility, Nature, Urban Design & Public Space, Housing, Economy & Jobs, Sport & Leisure, Urban Technology, Education & Social Infrastructure, Culture and Environment. In addition, some requirements on the process of developing the guiding principles were defined, e.g.:

- Special attention must be paid to the issue of quality of life, social aspects and different interest groups
- Contradictions and opposites between stakeholders must be clarified and weighed up transparently.
- Existing policies in sectoral planning must be critically reviewed and, if necessary, re-evaluated (away from the “we’ve always done it that way” attitude).
- Phase-oriented approach with concrete and tangible intermediate outputs
- Development of a binding consensus (independent of political majorities)
- Lively discussion on the issues, less on the procedure, critical questioning

Step 2: Participation offerings

In the second step, the focus was on the participation of the general public. The citizens were called to share concrete problems and suggestions for improvement in the areas defined in step 1. For this purpose, the city set up a website with an interactive city map on which citizens could leave location-specific comments and suggestions for improvements. In addition to the online tool, citizens were given the opportunity to write down their thoughts on urban development on postcards provided at various locations in the city. This ensured that even citizens who were not well versed in using the interactive web feature had the opportunity to participate.



Interactive Online Map to gather citizen feedback. Source: Dachau Webpage www.dachaudenkweiter.de

The response was very good. Within a period of 3 months, almost 2100 entries were made by the population, some of which were of very high quality. Most of the contributions referred to the topic of mobility (56 %).

Suggestions and proposals regarding the topic of mobility were mainly related to:

- The improvement of the local mobility
- Changes in the routing of motorised individual traffic (reduction of individual traffic to increase the quality of stay)
- Protection from the effects of road traffic respectively in terms of traffic calming (reduction or slowing down of transit traffic, emission control through speed limits, passive noise reduction systems)
- Extension of the pedestrian zone in the historic city center
- Construction of a city bypass
- Specific problems such as the extension of a specific cycle path or road sections

In the process, it became clear how different and sometimes contrary the views of the population on certain problems are. For example, when it comes to changes in motorised private transport, some citizens are in favour of building a city bypass, while others are in favour of expanding sustainable modes of transport (rail, bus, bicycle, walking) and reducing motor vehicle traffic in general. It is difficult to find a common denominator on such issues.

Step 3: Working groups to develop the guiding principles

In the next step, working groups were formed for each of the different thematic fields, whose task was to draft overarching guiding principles on the basis of the citizens' feedback and the results and stipulations of the city council kick-off workshop. To obtain the broadest possible view on the respective topics, the various groups consisted of experts, citizens, politicians, employees of the administration, representatives of property developers, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) and Caritas, the local youth association (Kreisjugendring), the senior citizens' council (Seniorenrat), etc. In a joint dialogue, future-oriented compromises have been achieved and goals and approaches to solutions have been sketched out.

As a result of these working groups, a predraft of the guiding principles was elaborated, which describes the vision of the city in 8 thematic fields with a total of 17 guiding principles.

For example, the thematic field "strolling city" focuses on revitalising the city centre and increasing the quality of stay so that it is more inviting for strolling in the future. This places special demands on traffic and mobility. Thus, car traffic is to be banned from the strolling area, parking is to be moved underground and the implementation of shared space concepts should lead to traffic calming. In addition, different parking spaces should be rededicated for gastronomic use. Furthermore, vulnerable people in the strolling zone should be strengthened, e.g. through barrier-free design of the street space.

Mobility is not considered as a separate thematic field, but is highly relevant in almost all of the 8 identified thematic fields. In this perspective, mobility is considered on the basis of the goals and needs of the citizens and not detached from the triggers of mobility.

Step 4: Evaluation of the guiding principles (online)

The citizens of Dachau were now called upon to vote on the draft guiding principles and express their opinions in an online survey. A total of 329 citizens took part. The voting results were very positive. The majority of the participants felt that the main requests had been taken into account by the guiding principles.

Step 5: Citizens' workshop

In the next step, the results of the participation process and the guiding principles were presented at a citizens' workshop. The presentation and discussion of the results with the citizens was accompanied by a large social event (workshops, music, child care). In addition, a short film was shown that informed about the milestones and results of the guiding principles development process. The almost 300 participating citizens were asked to evaluate the draft of the guiding principles and to contribute their ideas and comments at 8 stations showing the outcomes of the work in the different thematic fields so far. This way 350 more contributions could be collected from the citizens.



Citizens' workshop and contributions of ideas. Source: City of Dachau

It became obvious that the field of transport & mobility - similar to the results of the online participation - dominates the discussion and is of particular interest for the citizens of Dachau. Especially the promotion of environmentally friendly transport (public transport, cycling and walking) and traffic calming, especially in the city centre, were emphasised. However, there were also several voices that saw the interests of private transport disadvantaged.

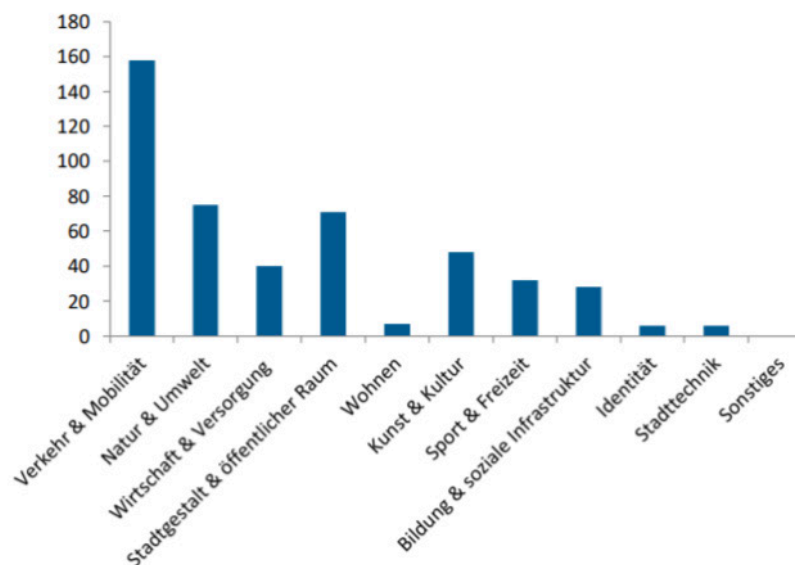


Figure 5: Contributions of the citizens at the citizens' workshop

In the next step, the results of the participation process and the guiding principles As one of the first measures and as a “visible” symbol of the continuation of the participatory approach, a so-called parklet was placed in the urban area during the citizens’ event.

The Parklet was designed as a mini-garden providing a feel-good factor that offers space for creative ideas. The Parklet is replacing 2 parking spaces and offers additional parking facilities for bicycles. The Parklet also stands to make traffic aspects visible. It conveys a certain relation of how big a parking space actually is and how this space can be used alternatively. aspects visible. It conveys a certain relation of how big a parking space actually is and how this space can be used alternatively.

Moreover, the Parklet contains an ‘idea tree’ where people can leave behind messages, for example about urban mobility issues. Citizens are also encouraged to not only make demands but also to change their own mobility behavior and to communicate this to other citizens leaving messages on the tree. The proximity of the parklet’s location to an ice cream parlour was beneficial insofar a lot of children and young people wrote messages. Regrettably, feedback from children and young people is often neglected.



Dachaus Parklet, a mini garden providing a feel good atmosphere and room for public participation
Source: www.dachau.de

Step 6: Finalisation of the guiding principles and adoption by the city council

In the last step, the guiding principles were refined on the basis of feedback from the citizens, finalised and adopted by the city council.

In the further work of the city council it became clear repeatedly, that many aspects had already been clarified and agreed during the campaign. Thus, in many situations, excessive discussions on decisions and possible adjournments of council meetings could be avoided.

Conclusion

Dachau's participation process shows by a very nice example that even small towns with comparatively low capacities can initiate extensive participation processes, which are ultimately supported to a high degree by the citizens.

Especially the topic of mobility seems to be of particular importance to the citizens. Car traffic is mainly perceived as too dominant. The reduction of noise and pollution, the promotion of pedestrian and bicycle traffic and the increase of the quality of stay in the city centre through traffic calming measures were central topics of the citizens' dialogue.

The effort for all involved was high, but in the long term, the agreed guiding principles will bring the following benefits:

- Availability of an agreed vision for the development/design of the city and for the preparation of a land use plan.
- All participants gain a better understanding of the concrete perceived problems in the city and the different points of view.
- The joint elaboration and adoption of the guiding principles leads to a high level of acceptance of concrete mobility measures and decisions - both on the political side and among citizens.
- Acceleration of processes for coordination/decision-making, as strategic points for further planning are already agreed upon.
- Strengthening of the sense of community and participation

Lessons learned:

- The events were well received and the citizens were very active in contributing, but good moderation is important for those kind of events, as a big challenge is to guide the participants and motivate them to contribute.
- A big challenge is to make the results of the individual phases tangible, so that they actually reflect the numerous discussions and achievements. Only in this way can the iterative development of the vision work and lead to a result that reflects the common denominator...
- It is important in a holistic approach which the development of the guiding principles follows, that the different areas of the administration work closely together and pursue a common goal.
- In the context of larger-scale participation processes, one also gets the positive feedback that usually is not received in smaller processes/events. Simply because it is possible to address and reach a broader audience. Often in smaller processes/events only the opponents of certain measures are present and mostly negative feedback is received. In a more extensive and long-term process that is oriented on the development of fundamental guiding principles, those citizens participate more strongly that really want to contribute in shaping the process and are more likely to offer solutions than to denigrate everything that is “new”.
- The process shouldn't last too long, it is important to keep up the momentum

Every citizen participation shows the politicians what the citizens want or do not want or what is important to them. During the development of Dachau's guiding principles, no one was ignored, everyone had several opportunities to contribute their views and concerns, and no one could say afterwards that he or she had not been invited to participate. It is important that the suggestions and comments of all participants are taken seriously. The individual citizen must in some way be able to feel considered in the results.

Even if not all proposals of the citizens can be implemented and individual interests ultimately have to bow to the majority in a democratic process, a common goal/ guiding vision was developed and decided, which reflects the interests of the majority of the population and creates a common and transparent basis for the further development of the city.