
Case Study Report

LIVING LAB & CO-CREATION PROCESS BASEL

QUARTIERLABOR

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Abstract

The aim of the living lab project QUARTIERLABOR is to actively involve local actors and residents in the co-visioning and co-creation process of the transformation of the Wettstein district in Basel (5'000 inhabitants, 10'000 employees) towards a sustainable development, initiated by the NGO project group QUARTIERLABOR Wettstein. The NGO and district association wettstein21 has launched a participatory process and initiated the project QUARTIERLABOR to initiate a change process towards a more sustainable district. The project group has developed a CHARTA according to the principles for sustainable development. It outlined four priority topics: Mobility, climate and nature, neighborhood and social living, transition processes. The interventions are aimed at inducing behavioral change towards more sustainable mobility energy-/climate behavioural patterns. For example the project-group is envisioning interventions such as "superblocks", bringing in more life and green into streetspace, reducing car parking and promoting fossil-free mobility. The CHARTA has further developed (co-created) specific project proposals (interventions) both in the short and longer term that require additional efforts, for instance the support of the municipal authorities and the businesses in the neighborhood.

Keywords

Quartierlabor, Living Lab, Co-Creation, participation, climate adaption, wettstein21, case study, Basel, Switzerland

1. Participatory approach Co-Creation process QUARTIERLABOR

1.1. Summary

This summary is the review of a two-year co-creation process in a Living Lab, which produced a CHARTA for a sustainable Wettstein district under the guidance of the project group QUARTIERLABOR, initiated by Christoph Keller, president of wettstein21 and Nicole Wirz, member of the board of wettstein21. The CHARTA has been handed over to the government of Basel in June 2022 with 300 signatures.

1.2. Why a "QUARTERLABOR" in the Wettstein district?

Where should there be green spaces, how can a neighborhood become climate-neutral and what is the kind of use of the open public space? In the QUARTIERLABOR, residents from the neighborhood discussed in a two-year process how they envision sustainable neighborhood development. They did so in an open process initiated by wettstein21, where everyone was invited to participate. This bottom-up process was steered by Nicole Wirz and Christoph Keller. The project is managed by urban planner Nicole Wirz. The project group QUARTIERLABOR consists of a diverse group of people with skills in urban planning, communication, politics and other disciplines.

1.3. Participation with pilot character

The initiators see the CHARTA and the required measures as a lighthouse project for sustainable, climate-neutral neighborhood development that can also be transferred to other neighborhoods in the city. With the CHARTA, they formulate a self-commitment on the one hand, and on the other hand they address the municipal authorities. With their support and together with the residents of the neighborhood, the proposed projects are to be implemented as quickly as possible. The neighborhood is to become - in the sense of a real laboratory - a lively, participatory place with a laboratory character, in order to pave the way towards a climate-neutral neighborhood development and thus promote a sustainable lifestyle. CHARTA is the result of an open, participatory process in which the people of the neighborhood were able to contribute their ideas. The initiative derives from the motivation, that the neighborhood population can make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of our living space.



Figure 1: public QUARTIERLABOR event

1.4 The QUARTIERLABOR as a living laboratory

The term QUARTIERLABOR stands for the program and organizational form, which can make decisions in a self organized way. The designation of this process as QUARTIERLABOR is borrowed from the scientific approach of "Reallabor" in Germany. The term "Reallabor" describes a transdisciplinary research and development in which science and society cooperate on sustainable solutions.

From the beginning on, the intention was to organize the process of sustainable neighborhood development with the involvement of science and research, the administration and the neighborhood population. Through the collaboration with the sustainability research unit of the University of Basel and the University of Applied Sciences Eastern Switzerland later on, the experimental and testing format could be applied.

1.5 The CHARTA of the QUARTIERLABOR in short

The focus of the project group QUARTIERLABOR is taking measures for climate adaption and creating a healthy environment in the district of Wettstein. It would like to develop the Wettstein neighborhood to become more sustainable and healthy. The CHARTA consists of four chapters: sustainable mobility, climate adaption and ecology, renewable energy production as well as social activities in the neighborhood.

The CHARTA of QUARTIERLABOR foresees a combination of long-term measures and short-term actions. It focusses on short-term interventions (so called tactic urbanism) in a more experimental approach

(Reallabor / living lab) in order to shape long-term changes in the use of the public open space for a more resilient behavior of the citizens.

One priority that evolved is on greening the parts with heat islands and changes towards a sustainable mobility in line with ideas of superblocks¹ and a positive energy district. Superblocks that reduce car mobility and parking spaces, and promote PV, creative forms of space conversion for encounters, sports, health, art/culture and more short-term behavioral changes.



Figure 2: CHARTA: the Superblock concept



Figure 3: CHARTA: climate adaption and greening



Figure 4: CHARTA: concept for public encounter



Figure 5: CHARTA: concept for renewable energy

This process requires a transdisciplinary approach to co-creatively develop and implement ideas. It involves different stakeholders such as residents, businesses, local government but also researchers (i.e., a "living lab"). The objective of the QUARTIERLABOR is to implement a part of superblocks concept into the neighborhood.

2. The process QUARTIERLABOR

2.1. Milestones of the process

Public involvement played an absolutely central role in the process. The project group of the QUARTIERLABOR held several public events where neighbors could meet. This was important for the

¹ An urban area consisting of several blocks (e.g. 3*3 building blocks), usually closed to through traffic, with residences, commercial, social, and recreational facilities.

formulation of common concerns and networking. In addition to regular meetings in the project group, the public QUARTIERLABOR events were groundbreaking for sensitization and collective shaping of the public opinion. And the collection of signatures for the CHARTA at the end made a considerable contribution to the dissemination of the requests, described in the CHARTA. The process was structured by these QUARTIERLABOR events and ended with collecting support by signing the CHARTA.

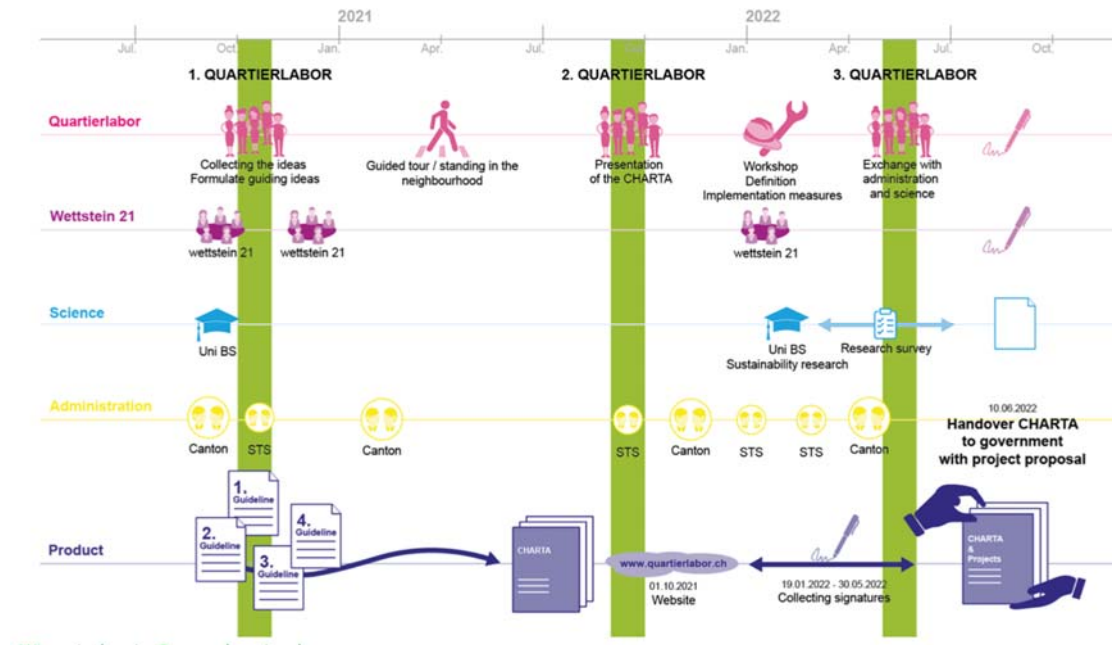


Figure 6: Overview of the process of developing the CHARTA

2.2. The first QUARTIERLABOR workshop

The QUARTIERLABOR started in September 2020 with a first public kick-off event, moderated by Christoph Keller and Nicole Wirz. More than forty people from the neighborhood collected ideas, discussed and inspired each other. The event included a first part with different input speeches as inspiration, as well as a workshop part in the style of a World Café.

The ideas from the kick-off event were compiled and then grouped according to key ideas. These four main ideas summarized the different objectives of the working groups. Afterwards, the project ideas could be assigned to the main ideas. Based on this collection of ideas, guiding principles were developed in a conceptual phase on various topics such as participation, mobility, climate and environment neighborhood.

Figure 1: Principles of the CHARTA

Between April and September 2021, further preparatory work was carried out with a committed project group consisting of ten residents, including a series of site visits and observations in the neighborhood to develop specific project ideas. From these considerations, a "CHARTA for a sustainable Wettstein neighborhood" was formulated. The "CHARTA" states that the residents of the neighborhood share responsibility for climate change, that they want to focus on renewable energies and sustainable mobility, and that they see their neighborhood as a pilot project for the possibilities of tomorrow.

2.3 The second QUARTIERLABOR workshop

Due to the pandemic, the second public QUARTIERLABOR event took place in September 2021 only. In the first part of the event, moderated by Christoph Keller, the draft CHARTA was presented by Nicole Wirz and explained in depth by the project group. In the second part, the CHARTA was discussed and supplemented with further project ideas.

In a consultative vote the CHARTA was adopted from the participants with great approval. From the many suggestions, the implementation ideas were then finalized and further developed.

In January 2022, the CHARTA with all project proposals was published on the website www.quartierlabor.ch in order to collect signatures from other individuals, organizations and associations.

In spring 2022, a research group of the sustainability research unit of the University of Basel conducted a survey based on the "CHARTA" to gather the opinion of the neighborhood population on possible measures and activities. Around fifty people from the neighborhood took part in the survey, which the students collected partly as an online survey and partly as personal interviews by the accompanying group.

2.4 The third QUARTIERLABOR workshop

In May 2022 the third QUARTIERLABOR event took place, moderated by Christoph Keller. The CHARTA was set in the context of work on sustainable development from science, government and research. It included a first part with presentations of public administration and an input about a scientific research about the feasibility of superblocks in Swiss cities, and a second part with discussion between the speakers and with the audience. They reflected on the topic of climate adaption in the city, the developed climate adaption concept and possible measures in the neighbourhood. Furthermore the topic of implementation Superblocks in the district was intensively discussed.

2.5 Handover of the CHARTA to the government

In June 2022, the project group handed over the "CHARTA for a sustainable Wettstein Quarter" to the Major, Beat Jans, with approximately three hundred signatures from private individuals and associations, most of whom are from the Wettstein district. Together with the CHARTA, a proposal to realize a pilot experiment for a superblock in summer of 2023 was handed over.

In August 2022, the project group was informed that the CHARTA will be treated as a petition to be responded within 1½ years notice.

3. Conclusions from the process

3.1 About Participation and Administration

Urban development is not only institutionally anchored, but also refers to the interaction between the city administration and the city residents with their cultural values. Unfortunately, such forms of bottom-up participation processes are still too little established to fit into the standard repertoire of planning departments.

The QUARTIERLABOR process clearly distinguishes itself from top-down processes in urban planning, but also from cooperative planning between private and public organizations. Just by continuously involving

the city government and administration in the bottom-up process, the usual top-down approach in urban planning may be noticeably influenced.

The QUARTIERLABOR was organized as a participatory process with very flat hierarchies. Basically, everyone could participate. The appropriate composition of the group was quickly determined by the need to work in a consensus-oriented manner. The complexity of the problem was sometimes a challenge for all participants.

3.2 Applying methods and instruments

Participatory neighborhood development processes require a certain openness and bandwidth in dealing with issues and non-formalized process structures. It is a great challenge to find a common framework for action in urban development processes. For this purpose, suitable methods and instruments must be applied. The "CHARTA", together with the specific project proposals in the appendix, became a tool that proved very useful for a neighborhood development project. The CHARTA also required the commitment of everyone, which was particularly appropriate for participatory processes with flat hierarchies.

3.3 Developing a concept

To conceptualize the different ideas is the most essential content-related part of the process. How a concept idea is concretized depends largely on the factors driving the project. The program of the QUARTIERLABOR has intended a local and temporally limited, experimental transformation of space with the claim to initiate developments and processes in this area with testing new scenarios. The QUARTIERLABOR thus is a process in which new forms of neighborhood and urban development can be anticipated, tried out and tested. The QUARTIERLABOR's programmatic goal has been not only to conceptualize, but also to address implementation. Therefore, with the handover of the CHARTA to the city government, a specific application for a temporary superblock pilot project was submitted.

3.4 Structuring the processes

Urban development and transformation processes are long-term processes because they often require complex procedures for implementation. Despite their open-endedness, participatory processes should be structured and controlled in terms of time. The specific intention was also to test and explore scopes for short- to medium-term change to determine the implementation of sustainable development. In addition, it is essential that the process, or rather the aspects and actors behind it, become visible through joint actions. Meanwhile participation processes in planning are carried out mostly in a top-down approach, in the QUARTIERLABOR process we are dealing with a bottom-up approach of participation in a self-organized process.

3.5 Networking of actors

The anchoring in existing neighborhood organizations facilitates the mobilization of the neighborhood population. Networking on the horizontal level with other actors and stakeholders is important for dissemination, but also time-consuming. Not all stakeholders can be reached in one process. The understanding of roles or diverging interests can also lead to tensions. Negotiating different interests is part of neighborhood development work.

3.6 Integrate planning expertise

Knowledge about processes, other projects, technical responsibilities and other stakeholders is needed. It is the task of the project management to structure, bundle and summarize the formulated aspects. The professional understanding and knowledge of urban development processes play an extremely important

role. Involving people who already have experience in or even professional knowledge in urban development processes is of great advantage.

The formulation of a CHARTA for the entire neighborhood was the most comprehensive declaration of intent for a neighborhood development project. From a professional point of view, this has proven very successful. However, expert knowledge becomes a necessary prerequisite with this increasing complexity.

4. Instructions for a neighborhood development process

4.1 How do we organize a neighborhood development process?

For self-organized processes and projects, the internal organization is probably one of the biggest challenges. Especially if it is not a single action but a large-scale project over a longer period of time, the involvement of the public, the setting up of a project group, and its coordination plays an essential role. Decisions should be made quickly and without complications, and everyone involved should share responsibility. The more people are involved, the more the question of decision-making structures and processes arises. An open organization with flat hierarchies makes it possible to involve motivated people quickly and to share enthusiasm.

4.2 How do we coordinate for a neighborhood development process?

In order to turn a project idea into a project with public support, there is the necessity of organizing tasks after the initial phase. This is not easy in self-organized processes, because it is time-consuming and has to be organized by volunteers.

Holding joint meetings is important for group dynamics, but also for dissemination. Public events also give the opportunity to discuss and spread project ideas and to find fellow campaigners. In the preparation of an event, it should be possible to involve everyone who is interested with certain tasks. Good preparation is important and takes time. Online events are less time-consuming to organize, but they must be technically flawless.

4.3 How do we plan a neighborhood development process?

Project goals should be defined at an early stage, so that all participants or those who want to participate know what the project is about and actions contribute to it. With group dynamics, project goals experience modifications. However, the guiding framework should be clearly defined from the beginning and adhered to as the project progresses. The question arises which measures can be used to achieve this project goal. These should also be determined as soon as possible, as this helps to structure the process.

The process duration of a project should be clarified at the beginning. Is it a one-time action in the next six months or a complex project to be developed jointly? What is the final goal of the process? To get as many people as possible to participate, to collect as many signatures as possible, etc.? How is this process therefore characterized and who can participate?

Even a self-organized process needs planning on the timeline, especially if stakeholders such as the population, neighborhoods, other organizations or the administration are involved or should be involved. In the initial phase, a simple "script" is sufficient, in which the process is divided into phases with different process objectives. This script should be adhered to and only deviated from in exceptional

cases. It is also advisable to define the most important milestones early, especially if these are linked to public announcements and events.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The QUARTIERLABOR as an urban development tool

The implementation of project ideas in urban development is a great challenge when legal or administrative procedures have to be followed. Normally these processes take a long time and a visible effect takes a long time. The engagement of the participating population is thus hardly rewarded, and they turn away again. The existing political instruments are usually time-consuming and require good knowledge of the framework and access to politics.

To improve this situation, new tools should be introduced at the municipal level to bypass this bottleneck. One way of doing such, would be a experimentation clause in the legislation, allowing limited and reversible experiments in the built environment, for testing innovations in living labs. The other way would be a district budget, giving neighborhoods the some money to decide themselves about little improvements for their environment. Smaller projects and measures could be implemented much quicker in this way.

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