Neal Osberghaus, 709376

Sociocultural Centers

and the impact of the local government

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of local government relationships on key characteristics of sociocultural centers such as democratic decision-making, grassroots and user orientation, self-administration and cultural participation.

The sociocultural centers under investigation are located in Cologne, Germany. Two municipality-led centers (MCs) and two community-led centers (CCs) were analyzed, focusing on the approaches and perceptions of the managers.

The findings reveal that municipality-led centers face significant restrictions due to bureaucratic regulations, affecting their financial and personnel autonomy. In contrast, community-led centers, while enjoying greater autonomy, struggle with financial dependencies and administrative burdens related to third-party funding. Citizen participation is partly dependent on the legal form of the centers. Both types of centers prioritize neighborhood-specific services and cultural participation but differ in their approaches to citizen involvement.

The findings highlight the importance of regular dialogue and collaboration between the centers. Despite financial constraints and perceived lack of acknowledgement by the local administration (especially as compared to the so-called “high culture”), these centers continue to serve as vital spaces for community engagement, fostering inclusivity and cultural education. Regardless of the centers governance structure the findings underscore the need for balanced and adequate municipal support to sustain the sociocultural mission of these centers in an era of interactive governance.

Key words: Sociocultural centers; Interactive Governance; Community-based initiatives; Citizen participation; Cultural participation

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Inhalt

Variables	Codes	Example
Type and Extent of Municipality Support		
	requirements coming with support	"there are target and performance agreements, which are exectued loosel
	proportional decrease	"the subsidies decreased reltively to the budget"
	proportion of municipal support	"the operating cost subsidies are around 20% of the budget"
	perceived underfinancing	"the subsidies are simply not enough"
	operating cost-subsidies	We receive an operating cost subsidy
	budget provided	"this center is incorporated in the cities budget plan"
	infrastructure	"the buildings are provided by the city"
	personnel support	"the staff is incorporated in the cities staffing plan"
	stability of income	"we plan our budget two years in advance"
	third-party funding	"our biggest part is the acquisition of projects"
	commercial operation	"We deliver food to schools and generate income through the café"
	room rentals	"We are obliged to offer rooms, the income we can keep"
Collaboration & Partnership		
	shared vision	"there is a shared vision among the Kölner Elf"
	Joint activities	"we are together at Colognes Voluntary day"
	Dialogue	"We meet every 6 weeks"
	Co-production of Policies	"The conceptual framework has been created in collaboration"
	Committment	"they leave us alone, but there is also no support"
	networks	"I am in a good neighborhood network here..."
Institutional Environment		Workshops with government representatives help us understand policy c
	Regluations	"there is a set division of responsibilities, which is regulated by the city"
	hierarchies	"Looking at the organigram, the city of Cologne is somehwat hierarchical"
	legal form	"this center is organized as a registered nonprofit association"
Self-administration		
	financial autonomy	"I am not allowed to make use of the generated income, due to regulations
	budgetary autonomy	"I can shift something in the budget"
	strategic autonomy	"I am in a satelite, far away from the city, we are very free"
	Regulations	"the target and performance regulations are not very strict"
Cultural Participation & Education		
	performning/ producing program	"every Tuesday we have a comedy program"
	attending/ receiving program	"people can come and try cultural techniques, such as knittery, woodwork
	objective	"we want to offer low-threshold access to culture"
	diversity in programs	"range from comedy to belly dance"
	visitors	"Our hous has 100.000 visitors per year"
	minority focus	"we offer space for self-organization for people that dont have spaces"
Grassroots, User Orientation & Democratic Decision-making		
	advising	"We are open to critique, when they come to us, we try to implement that"
	co-production	"we have some volunteers designing some programs"
	co-deciding	"as a member you can decide on the long-term strategy of the house"
	formal	"as an association we have members and a board of directors, on volunta
	informal	"a lot happens in day-to-day business"
	use of voting	"the members elect the board in the annual general meeting"
	inner organizational democracy	"The decisions are made in the team"

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AGM – annual general meeting

CBIs – Community-based initiatives

CBOs – Community-based organizations

CC – Community-led center

MC – Municipality-led center

NPM – New Public Management

TPA – Traditional Public Administration

1. Introduction

As multifaceted as local communities are, as multifaceted come their objectives and challenges. A reflection of diversity are their Community-based initiatives (CBIs), which can be found all over the world and which operate in a wide range of domains concerning the community, such as health, education, environment, economy and culture (just to name a few) (Igalla, Edelenbos, & van Meerkerk, 2021). Countries all over the world begin to recognize the benefits of these initiatives and try to make use of their adaptability, efficiency, and 'local knowledge' (just to name a few) (Igalla et al., 2021). Especially in Western countries, Interactive forms of governance are on the rise and with it citizen and community engagement become more and more significant in tackling 'wicked' problems (Geuijen, Moore, Cederquist, Ronning, & van Twist, 2017). . The provision of public goods and services no longer is solely the task of governments; rather, they are becoming more involved in collaborations, transferring that responsibility to the community (Igalla, Edelenbos, & van Meerkerk, 2019) and engage residents in co-creation initiatives. However, the extents and effects of citizen participation can vary extensively, depending on the initiating actor (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b). While citizen initiatives traditionally arise as a bottom-up reaction to increasing inequalities, market failure and an inability of the state to provide public goods (Teasdale, 2012), governments often see them as a 'tool' for decision-making, representativeness and democratic legitimacy. However they tend to hesitate in granting substantial 'control' over the process (Edelenbos, van Meerkerk, & Koppenjan, 2017; Igalla et al., 2019).

Community-based initiatives can play a significant role in influencing a neighborhood's development by providing essential services to local residents and promoting community cohesion through community activities (Marwell, 2004). The involvement of community-based groups in decision-making processes can come with e.g. an improvement of service provision of public goods, an increase in citizen involvement, and less misallocation of resources (Díaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, & Ruiz-Euler, 2014). Community initiatives can hereby draw on "local knowledge" which can sometimes be exclusively available to members of the community (e.g. neighborhood) (Corburn, 2003).

Researcher such as Arnstein (1969, p. 216) already made it clear: *"Citizen Participation is Citizen Power"*. Although, Initiatives initiated by the community are a way for citizens to guarantee "citizen power", for example in a sense of managerial autonomy and the possibility to discuss conditions of change (Arnstein, 1969), community initiatives are often heavily reliant on government funding (Bailey, 2012) and government support (Igalla et al., 2021). While government support is mostly said to come with positive results (Igalla et al., 2019), there are also changes and costs which can occur when receiving this support (Vincent, 2006). This

can come with a loss in CBIs characteristics and advantages, such as a loss in autonomy, loss in flexibility, or goal displacement (Froelich, 1999; Walker & McCarthy, 2010).

One example of these citizen initiatives are sociocultural centers in Germany, of which a big part was forming in the 70s and 80s as a reaction to the cultural policy and institutions of the time, which were focusing on “high culture”, rather than cultural services serving the majority of the population (Borstel, 2015). Driven by the motto “culture for everyone, from everyone” most of those centers came to place by a rather bottom-up approach, through active citizen occupying old industrial sites and houses (Borstel, 2015). Nowadays, those centers are recognized as established cultural infrastructure in Germany and are sometimes incorporated into the municipal administration (Borstel, 2015). Traditionally, most of those centers have their foundation in a will for “democratization of culture” (Bundesverband Soziokultur e.V., 2023) and have been characterized by a highly self-organized, democratic and participatory nature (T. Knoblich, 2001). Established to serve the community in offering space for cultural participation & education for all people (T. Knoblich, 2001). Apart from their bottom-up nature, some of the centers have been established, or taken over, by municipalities (Borstel, 2015).

In the city of Cologne there are 14 “Bürgerhauser & Bürgerzentren”, which are sociocultural centers. The community centers offer recreational, social, and cultural services and programs, which are aiming at “promoting self-initiative and self-help on the part of individuals and groups as well as dealing with important issues in the context of neighborhood work” for everyone (Stadt Köln, 2023b). The centers have been institutionalized and are organized among themselves, but also in an administrative unit of the city (Kölner Elf, 2023; Stadt Köln, 2023b). While they are also linked through shared values and the responsibility of serving the community, the *Bürgerhäuser* show differences in their task provision (way of serving the community) and their responsible body, as some are managed by the municipality and some are managed by the community itself (Stadt Köln, 2007).

1.1 Problem statement

Interactive governance brings a new importance to the inclusion of citizens, but it also reveals the acting out of government-interests and difficulties in citizen participation from a traditional government perspective (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b; Torfing, 2012)

Sociocultural centers, characterized by their democratic decision-making structures, grassroots and user-oriented approaches and self-administration, have historically emerged from bottom-up initiatives. These centers aim to serve the community by providing inclusive spaces for cultural engagement and education (Bundesverband Soziokultur e.V., 2019). However, as many of these centers become institutionalized and some come under municipal management, there is reason to believe that their approaches might change. On the other hand, CBIs are acting in a

regulatory environment and are supported by governments, which might already affect them (Vincent, 2006).

The shift from a bottom-up, community-driven model to a more top-down, government-led approach could lead to a loss of autonomy, flexibility, and the grassroots ethos that underpins their success. This transition poses significant challenges to preserving the participatory and democratic nature of sociocultural centers, potentially compromising their ability to effectively serve their communities and uphold their original mission of "culture for everyone, by everyone". However, in times of Interactive Governance, public authorities are more likely to become more participative and learn from those forms of organizations. Understanding and addressing these challenges is critical to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of sociocultural centers in fostering community cohesion and cultural participation.

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Question

The primary objective of this research is to explore how the relationship between sociocultural centers and municipalities influences the centers' approaches to their key characteristics, such as democratic decision-making structures, grassroots and user-oriented approaches and self-administration. Specifically, this study aims to:

Assess the impact of municipal management on the autonomy and flexibility of sociocultural centers.

Investigate on the participatory and democratic nature of sociocultural centers under different governance models

Identify challenges and opportunities of municipal support on the service design and service provision.

The central research question guiding this study is:

What effects does the relationship to the municipality have on the key characteristics of sociocultural centers?

In order to answer this research question and achieve the study aims, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

- How does municipal support influence the citizen engagement of sociocultural centers?
- How does municipal involvement effects democratic structures within sociocultural centers?
- How does the relationship to the municipality affect the autonomy of sociocultural centers?
- How does municipal support influence the approach to cultural participation & education in sociocultural centers?
- How does the relationship to the municipality impacts the overall mission of sociocultural centers?

By exploring these sub-questions, the research aims to understand how the often stringent and rule-bound nature of traditional governance and the varying levels of municipal support impact the fundamental characteristics of sociocultural centers. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which municipal relationships shape the functioning, autonomy,

and community engagement of these centers, thereby addressing the central research question comprehensively.

1.3 Relevance

The relationship between government, citizen and nonprofits is a widely discussed topic in the times of Networked governance (e.g. Torfing (2012)). There are different implications for whether citizen participation must be institutionalized in decision making processes and policy creation or not. There are different findings about the effectiveness and legitimacy outcomes of such citizen inclusion. Especially in the interactive governance literature self-organized groups are often seen as the ultimate stage of the participation ladder, while participation induced by the government is often seen as dissatisfying for the citizen and unsecure in the implementation of such outcomes (e.g. Arnstein (1969), Edelenbos and van Meerkerk (2016b)). To extent modes of Interactive Governance and inclusion of citizen into decision-making processes, it is from enormous relevance to get hold of the relationship between public authorities and citizen (initiatives).

2. Theoretical framework & Literature review

This section provides context on the various interactions between government, citizens, and organizations, focusing on the concept of interactive governance. It will describe the characteristics of public organizations and CBIs to prepare for the discussion of sociocultural centers, which are the research object. This examination feeds into the description of the relationship between municipalities and sociocultural centers, highlighting their potential advantages and costs. The different key characteristics of sociocultural centers will also be described, setting the stage for their measurement in the operationalization. This section forms the basis for the conceptual framework presented at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Interactive Governance: different forms of citizen participation

In its traditional sense, governments actions can be described as shaped by a “steering and control” nature, in which public officials are following clear rules and procedures in a strong hierarchical and centralized manner, which did not allow for many interactions with the “target” of the service (Torfing, 2012).

Globalization and denationalization have prompted governments to adopt interactive governance, addressing complex societal issues with limited power and resources (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b). Torfing (2012, pp. 1–2) defines it as a process where diverse actors collaborate to achieve common goals by mobilizing, exchanging, and deploying ideas, rules, and resources.

Therefore, new methods for citizen involvement are emerging in urban context (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). In its most radical form, interactive governance strives for “governance without government”, with some proponents advocating for minimal or no direct public sector involvement in governance (Torfing, 2012). Although interactive governance embodies the concept of collaboration and cooperation between different societal actors, it still inherits a form of “steering” by the government (Torfing, 2012). Governmental actors are seen as one among oth-

ers in the process of decision-making, which is “steering” – yes - but ideally without “command and control” (Torfing, 2012).

Interactive governance, aims to integrate public values into decision-making, enhancing the quality of decisions, disseminating information to the public, building trust in institutions, mitigating conflict, ensuring the cost-effectiveness of decisions (Beierle, 1999) and decreasing the veto power hold by citizens (Edelenbos, van Schie, & Gerrits, 2010). This approach can vary from discussion forums to direct decision-making (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006).

Edelenbos and van Meerkerk (2016b) differentiate between “government induced” and “citizen induced” interactive governance which come with differences in their nature and outcomes and lead to different interpretations of the concept.

Government induced involves highly structured procedures and often comes with an extended governmental control over the process and outcomes (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b). In these procedures the government is mostly deciding “when, which and how people get involved” (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016a), leading to uncertainty (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b) and potential frustration among participants (Edelenbos, 2005). This does not mean that citizens are placed in powerless positions, but the level of participation, from passive to co-productive, depends on the government’s decision on how much power to grant (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006).

Citizen-induced governance or “civic initiatives” emerges bottom-up (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b). These initiatives are formed by active citizens through a process of self-organization (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011), to serve community goals (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016b).

2.1.1 Public organizations

The organizational characteristics of public organizations is highly influenced by the state & governance traditions they operate in (Voorberg, Bekkers, Timeus, Tonurist, & Tummers, 2017). Public administration in Germany is until today deeply influenced by the Weberian bureaucratic model, which is marked by a hierarchical structure, clear division of labor, and strict adherence to legal norms (Kuhlmann, Proeller, Schimanke, & Ziekow, 2021). It is deeply rooted in the concept of Rechtsstaat, ensuring the protection of human dignity and individual freedom through a legalistic and rule-based framework (Kuhlmann et al., 2021). These characteristics can affect the public organizations flexibility, decision-making processes and openness to citizen participation (Voorberg et al., 2017) and although the “legalist” oriented system was not closed to managerial and networked influences, it “limited their scope” (Sommermann, 2021, p. 18).

Therefore public organizations are more likely to be highly regulated and affected by legal and formal regulations, which could, among other things, lead to less flexibility in the operation of organizations (Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976). On the other hand, public organizations often have the opportunity to draw on separate resources and powerful networks of the city, to complement their work (Rainey et al., 1976).

2.1.2 Community-based initiatives

In CBIs citizens are focused on taking matters into their own hands by providing public services in self-organization (Igalla, Edelenbos, & van Meerkerk, 2020). While they set their own rules, they are also operating in institutional contexts, which are not free from regulations and require them to cooperate with other actors, e.g. from the government and third sector (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016a; Healey, 2015). Some of them are organized in formal structures, others are more loosely organized, but they are concerned about providing public services to the community (Healey, 2015; Igalla et al., 2019). The history of CBIs is often grounded on a reaction to arising inequalities and a failure of the state in the provision of public goods (Teasdale, 2012)

Although CBIs structures and contexts are diverse Igalla et al. (2019) found the following aspects which are central to most citizen initiatives:

> *"1. [CBIs] are community-based and often locally oriented, which means that local residents […] are the (current) driving force behind the initiatives, they mobilize volunteers from within the community, and they focus on community needs.*
>
> *2. [CBIs] provide and maintain an alternative form of traditional governmental public services, facilities, and/or goods themselves, such as water distribution, education and training, and residential care;*
>
> *3. [CBIs] strive for autonomy, ownership, and control regarding internal decision-making;*
>
> *4. [CBIs] are often linked to formal institutions, such as local authority, governmental agencies, and NGOs, especially for facilitation and public funding;*
>
> *5. [CBIs] often develop their own business model to increase financial stability, which helps them continue their activities, but they are not focused on private profitmaking (i.e., profits are invested back into the local community)".* Igalla et al. (2019, pp. 1182–1183)

2.1.3 Sociocultural centers

The term socioculture was coined in the 1960s/70s as a result of the desire to reform the previous conservative cultural policy of the post-war period. As mentioned by many researchers so far, the term is lacking a standardized definition (Borstel, 2015; T. Knoblich, 2001; Wagner, 2021). It aimed to make culture accessible to everyone, not just educated middle class (T. Knoblich, 2001). A culture that met the living conditions of the time and did not conceal them (T. Knoblich, 2001). Socioculture as a political program and cultural practice in Germany has its roots in the New Cultural Policy and the New Social Movements of the 1970s (Statistisches Bundesamt [Destatis], 2020). Independent citizen movements established community centers, reclaimed public spaces, and created opportunities for cultural and participation, autonomy and community work (Borstel, 2015; T. Knoblich, 2001). Under the motto "culture for everyone, from everyone" and opposing the "high culture", different communities with different needs formed community centers with diverse foci (Borstel, 2015), often occupying old industrial sites and abandoned houses (Borstel, 2015). Some centers were later taken over or created by municipalities (Borstel, 2015).

Today, there are around 728 sociocultural centers in Germany (Destatis, 2020), along with numerous municipal community centers and initiatives aiming to establish self-organized centers (Borstel, 2015). Although chronically underfinanced, socioculture has become a permanent fixture in German cultural life and municipal policy (Borstel, 2015; T. Knoblich, 2001). These cen-

ters interact with governmental institutions and have different characteristics based on their origin and leadership.

The statutes of the Bundesverband Soziokultur e.V. (2019) (Federal Association of Socioculture) outline the main characteristics of sociocultural centers, which according to the literature context is suited to provide the basic nature of sociocultural centers:

- grassroots and user orientation, integration of different age groups, social classes and nationalities

- cross-sectoral cultural work,

- openness and transparencyc,

- forms of social political work and democratic culture,

- initiation of social, political and cultural learning processes,

- emphasizing the democratic and humanistic content of culture and resistance against fascist and inhuman endeavors,

- promotion of cultural and artistic self-activity and the next generation of artists,

- self-administration,

- use of all funds and income for the above-mentioned goals,

- democratic decision-making structure,

- non-commercial orientation.

Based on the statistical report of Destatis (2020) and in line with the motto “culture for everyone, from everyone” we see the common ground of those centers in their aim to enable everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and social status, to participate in art and culture and motivate them to become active themselves, while acknowledging local focus and local differences. They aim for cultural participation and cultural education (T. J. Knoblich, 2007).

Derived from this definition the nature of sociocultural centers is characterized by grassroots & user orientation, democratic structures, self-administration, and a focus on cultural participation & education.

Sociocultural centers' work is diverse, reflecting society's diversity. They engage in children’s and youth work, district work, events, senior citizen work, gender equality, multicultural work, environmental protection, educational and political work, migrant assistance, social work, and cross-border cooperation (Borstel, 2015). Their tasks often overlap with public service responsibilities of the government.

2.1.4 Relationship to the government

The relationship between nonprofit organizations and government varies between collaboration and conflict (Boris & Steuerle, 2006). Collaboration can have different effects on performance (Nederhand, 2021). Some literature suggests a positive correlation between collaboration and organizational performance, while other viewpoints indicate significant performance risks, suggesting partnerships with governmental bodies are best avoided (Nederhand, 2021). Nonprofits may achieve their goals through various levels of collaboration (Nederhand, 2021).

Although CBIs are self-organizing, they are not always independent from public funding (Igalla et al., 2019). Governments can help nonprofits in achieving their goals by providing necessary financial and non-financial resources, helping them to survive and expand (Gazley, 2008). Such collaboration can enhance a nonprofits' legitimacy and credibility with other prospective donors and network members, resulting in additional benefits (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990) and access to the policy arena, enabling CBIs to influence it (Chavesc, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004). This explains CBIs search for government funding and collaboration, often leading to professionalization of the organizations (Suarez, 2011).

However, higher levels of collaboration and professionalization can come with costs (Suarez, 2011). Nonprofits dependent on state finance are more likely to be influenced by the state in their operations and strategies (Anheier, Toepler, & Wojciech Sokolowski, 1997) potentially limiting their flexibility (Salamon, 1987). Governments may use nonprofits instrumentally, leading them to "demand their own programs or services rather than working collaboratively" (Gonzales, 2010, p. 58). To secure funding, nonprofits might tend to professionalize, shifting from volunteer-based to professional boards and employees, which could decrease grassroots and community orientation (Guo & Acar, 2005). Governmental reporting and compliance requirements can also restrict autonomy and decentralization (Smith, Lipsky, & Young, 1995).

Local government funding carries risks, such as "constraints and dependency", especially when the funding makes up a large part of the budget (Vincent, 2006). Financial constraints can affect human resource management, such as inability to offer long-term contracts, attract qualified personnel, or provide competitive wages (Vincent, 2006). Furthermore, financial constraints can influence the security and sustainability of organizations dependent on bigger donors in case of payment default (Vincent, 2006). The most crucial effect according to Vincent (2006) is the administrative burden diverting time from "creativitiy and future strategy" development to "research, administration and the justification of the aid received" (Vincent, 2006, p. 24). Contractual arrangements impose allow donors to influence operations and strategic directions through, for example restrictive conditions, such as control over fund management (Vincent, 2006). These conditions can be highly influential on the dynamic character of NGOs (Vincent, 2006).

Non-monetary government support, such as equipment, facilities, and staff, can also enhance operational capacity by reducing costs and enabling the use of resources which might otherwise be unavailable (Gazley, 2008). These resources may come with conditions, leading to dependency (Gazley, 2008).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The relationship with the government significantly influences the operations and processes of organizations, particularly regarding citizen inclusion and the delegation of power. While some organizations thrive with governmental support, others benefit from maintaining distance from local authorities. Regardless, it is essential to recognize that organizations do not operate in an institutional vacuum. Therefore, a conceptual framework, grounded in the literature review and following variables, is developed. This research primarily adopts a “de facto” perspective, prioritizing managers' perceptions over formal regulations, as actual practice often diverges from formal policies (following (Bach, 2014)).

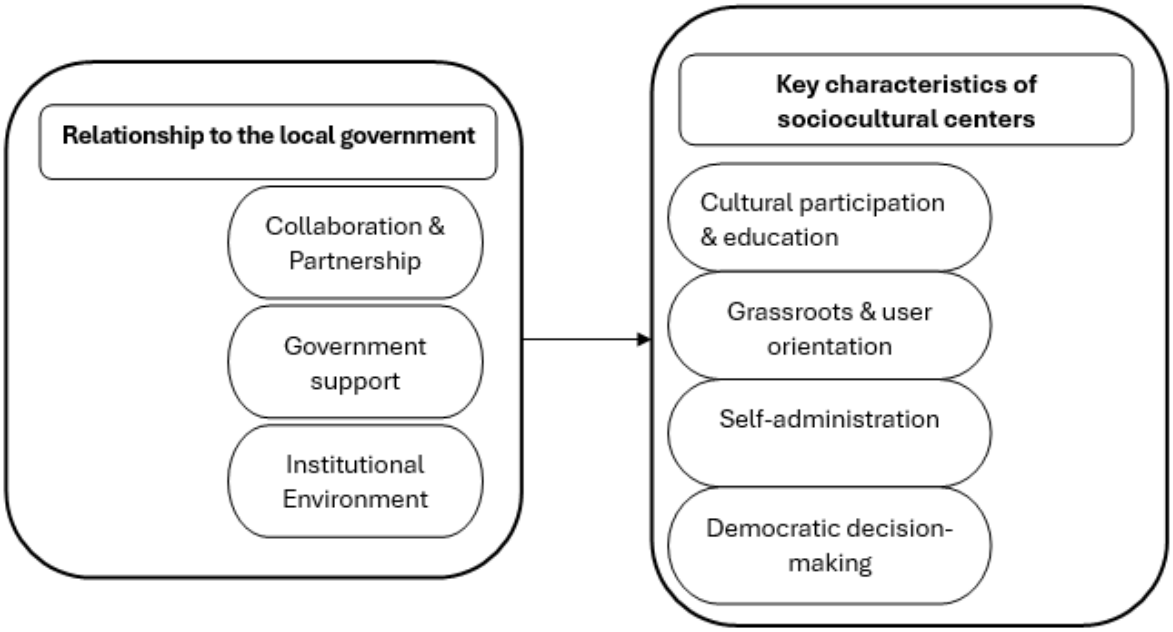

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Type and extent of municipality support

Support of the government can come in various different forms, such as financial and non-financial resources, as well as (favorable) policies, each with advantages and costs. This study follows Vincent (2006) to examine external and internal funding of sociocultural centers and the ratio of external to internal funding. Contractual conditions, choices and methods imposed from the outside, the duration of support, and linkage of funds to specific purposes will also be considered. Additionally, in-kind support, such as infrastructure and technical assistance, will be analyzed, focusing on perceived support and constraints.

2.2.2 Collaboration and Partnerships

Nederhand (2021) highlights the significant role of collaboration between nonprofit organizations and the government. Following Nederhand (2021), Collaboration is described as a process where organizations work together, focusing on coordinated efforts to reach mutual objectives, through information exchange, resources sharing and joint activities. These cooparations can

include regular communication, collaborative policy development, and the exchange of resources. In line with that, this research focuses on dialogue (frequency and depth of contact with public officials) and joint activities (level of involvement in policy co-creation). This will be measured as perceived by the interviewees.

2.2.3 Institutional Environment

Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasize the importance of the institutional environment in shaping organizations. These institutional rules function as "rationalized myths" providing legitimacy for organizational actions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Sociocultural centers must comply with different organizational legal forms and centers of legitimization. This study investigates the regulations and policies affecting these structures and their operational efficiency, considering the potential for a "command and control" nature (e.g. (Peters, 2018)), this research takes the legal and regulatory framework into account in which these centers are acting and hereby the influence on the actions as perceived by the managers.

2.2.4 Grassroots/ user orientation and democracy

The word *democracy* comes from the ancient Greek word *demokratia*, which is composed of the words *demos* – meaning people – and *kratia* – which together becomes a form of governance in which the people of a specific system are participating in the decision-making regarding its matters, which typically happens through the election of representatives (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Therefore, citizen participation is deemed crucial for democracy and theories on deliberative and participatory democracy propose that active citizen involvement boosts democratic quality by developing civic skills, enhancing legitimacy and ensuring inclusivity (Michels & Graaf, 2010) and higher levels of participation can enhance the democratic nature of governance structures (Pateman, 2012). At the same time, people that are involved in the affairs of the sociocultural centers are the members and users of the center, hence in this work it is assumed that the approach to citizen participation also includes the grassroots and user orientation. Therefore, grassroots and user orientation, and the level of democracy are both covered through the implementation of the participation ladder (see below).

As the centers are predominantly led by professionals, this study takes into account the extent to which members of the community are able to participate in shaping the organizations strategies and governance. Based on the participation ladder by Edelenbos and Klijn (2006, p. 429), which represents different forms of involvement for citizens in an interactive governance process, levels of citizen involvement are categorized:

> *"Informing":* in this form the agenda is set by the people in charge and there is no opportunity for citizens to be involved.
>
> *"Consulting":* the agenda is mostly determined but there is a chance for citizens to be involved as "useful discussion partners"
>
> *"Advising":* Citizens can give advice but there is no guarantee that this will be included.
>
> *"Coproducing":* Citizen are actively collaborating throughout the process.
>
> *"Co-deciding":* Citizen are collaborating and share equal decision-making power with authorities.

In this case the ladder is referring to the organizational administration as the center of power, or the executive force of the organization, not necessarily the (local) government.

In operationalizing democratic decision-making structures (especially in line with interactive governance), we see the (chance for) participation of citizen as the core element of democratic decision-making. Additionally, as structurally anchored organizational democracy (formalized) leads to higher levels of participation (Unterrainer, Palgi, Weber, Iwanowa, & Oesterreich, 2011)) "formal" and "informal" ways of approaching participation are evaluated.

2.2.5 Self-administration

As this study is about comparing community-led and municipality-led entities we must acknowledge the fact that municipality-led organizations are per definition not self-organized (see chapter 2.12).

Self-administration in this work is referred to as a level of autonomy the center has in delivering its service.

Self-administration refers to the level of autonomy a center has in delivering its services. Autonomy can be formal (manifested in rules) or de facto (actual autonomy in daily procedures). This study will focus on de facto (as perceived by the interviewees) autonomy, evaluating financial, personnel, and policy autonomy (Bach, 2014) to capture the "nature" of sociocultural centers. Autonomy involves the capacity of public organizations to set and implement their priorities independently.

2.2.6 Cultural Participation & education

Measuring cultural participation involves evaluating "attending/receiving," "productive/performing," and "interactive" dimensions. Receiving culture is hereby characterized by a more "one-way" consumption of cultural performances etc.

Production of culture refers especially to the production by amateurs and is linked to self-efficacy, it includes the provision of a "platform" for people to express themselves in a cultural manner. The last is interaction which we would categorize under production, as it involves the "dialogue" between receiving subject and source of art. Which involves a change on the source, by the receiver. Here it is argued that a person working with wood is changing the source (in this case the wood) and produces something out of it. Therefore, production of art or culture could be argued as always being something interactive.

The incentive behind measuring participation is one of measuring the approach of the cultural centers to cultural participation. First of all, it arises out of the idea behind "goal displacement" addressed in Chapter 2.1.4, as we see the danger of the municipality setting this goal behind other as urgent perceived social tasks, because cultural participation is an "optional service" opposed to "mandatory services", which the municipality is obligated to provide (Stadt Köln, 2023a). Furthermore, we need to assess if the dimensions of cultural participation are covered by the centers, meaning if they offer programs for cultural participation and if this is a priority of those.

The connection between the concepts of cultural education and participation makes separate measurement difficult (Ermert, 2009; T. J. Knoblich, 2007). As "cultural education is education for cultural participation" (Ermert, 2009), this research takes self-realization in cultural fields as

decisive in this case. Cultural education will therefore be measured by the opportunity to participate in cultural production.

3. Research design and methodological justification

3.1 Research Character and Method

This study aims to examine the influence of the relationship to the local government on the key characteristics of sociocultural centers. This explanatory study utilizes case studies to understand complex social phenomena, challenging the misconception that case studies are only for exploratory research (Yin, 2018).

The case study design as a framework for the research "arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (Yin, 2018, p. 35) and "allow[s] you to focus in-depth on a 'case' and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2018, p. 35). Also, this work is guided by a case study framework, to ensure coherence during the research process. Looking at this work a multiple case study design has been chosen. A multiple case study design is generally expected to be more time and cost intensive, but it is also considered to deliver more robust and more valuable insights than single case studies (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Case selection: 4 community centers, two different responsible bodies

There is a danger for selection bias, when choosing a case to study. However, random case selection is not ideal for a very low N sample, as the risk of selecting an unrepresentative case is high (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Two main objectives have to be addressed: representativeness and variation (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Case selection is guided by research objectives and the case's position within the population (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This multiple case-study aims to isolate the *relationship to the local government* keeping other variables as similar as possible to achieve an isolating effect (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Yin (2018) recommends choosing "pilot cases" to become aware of the context and scope, aiding in developing "relevant lines of questions" (Yin, 2018, p. 147). In order to achieve this and in line with Yin(2018), expert consultation ensured appropriate case selection and minimized risks of dissimilarities. An expert, a former public official from Cologne's responsible entity *Bürgerzentren und Bürgerhäuser*, and now advisor for one community center (not chosen in this case study), provided guidance. The following cases have been chosen.

3.2.1 Bürgerhaus Kalk (MC1)

The center was founded in 1990 by the city (M1) and it is located in one Colognes fifteen socially disadvantaged areas (in German "Sozialraumgebiet") (Stadt Köln, 2024). In this area also first tendencies of gentrification are coming up (M1). It is the smallest of the houses examined.

The manager has an expertise in the social, arts and pedagogic field and has been working in these for decades. The manager has been active in the specific neighborhood for more than a

decade and was responsible for the neighborhood work of another nonprofit organization in the social field. She was always active in the nonprofit sector and comes from outside the municipal administration. The manager is working in the center for 6 years now (whole paragraph M1).

The underlying mission of the center is to provide “a place of encounter, a place where everyone can participate [...] regardless of origin, skin color, social status and financial means” (M1). Focal points of the center are “youth and children cultural work, and “to become even more a place where it is even easier to participate”, in a sense of “creating low-threshold spaces where people can try out various cultural techniques [...] even if they cannot contribute financially” (M1).

In the center 5,5 full time employees are working. Three of them have either a pedagogical education or a social work background. One is an electrician who takes care of the building's maintenance and one and a half positions in administration. Then there are 20-30 freelancers working and up 80 people volunteers which are in the advisory board, giving workshops or other work (M1).

3.2.2 Bürgerhaus Stollwerck (MC2)

Before the center was established in 1987, it was preceded by the biggest occupation in the history of Cologne, in which an old chocolate factory was subject. After negotiations with the city an old building was refunctioned as a sociocultural center, which now is the biggest in the federal state (KuLaDig).

The manager of the center is in the position for 6 years. He has been a civil servant for over 20 years, with extensive experience in different municipal roles (M2).

The main goal of the center is to offer low-threshold access to culture and also create opportunities for people to create culture (M2). Then they want to offer social services to their users, which could be sports, social advice, and handicraft (M2). The house is not deeply involved in the offering of cultural education, but sometimes artists that have a space in their building are doing so (M2).

The center has 10 full time employees which are employed with the city and additionally freelance workers and support staff, which makes a total of 50 employees.

3.2.3 Bürgerzentrum Ehrenfeld (CC1)

The “BüzE” is placed in an old industrial site which was abandoned from 1969 until 1980. In 1977 an association was founded by members of the Social Democratic Party in Cologne, with the wish to refunction the building as a sociocultural center, which happened after a symbolic occupation in 1980 (C1). “At that time the city of Cologne and the association ‘Bürgerzentrum Ehrenfeld e.V.’ set up a sponsorship contract, which stated ‘OK, you get the house for free, we as the city are responsible for this house similar to how a landlord would be, but you don't pay any money. In return, you provide socio-cultural work for the citizens’ and some other points”. The center is located in an area which has undergone radical socioeconomic transformations, evolving from an industrial and migrantic-dominated into a trendy neighborhood. This change has been accompanied by gentrification, leading to rising property prices and changing the local communities’ character.

The manager of the center has been working for the center for 3 years. He has an economics background, but before his position he has been working for a political party for several years in Cologne. Additionally, he is voluntary board member and founder of other social welfare and arts associations (C1).

The center employs 27 full-time equivalents and approximately another 10 freelance workers and service staff in the café. Around 70 people receive payments from the center. Additionally, to that 100-120 volunteers are working in the center (C1).

The goal of the center is to be a place of encounter that is there for everyone and inclusive, meaning that especially people that are excluded such as minorities are welcome to participate (C1).

3.2.4 Alte Feuerwache (CC2)

The center “Alte Feuerwache” is placed in an old fire station, which has been abandoned for decades before the center was placed in there (C2). In 1977 an association was founded to restructure the site as a sociocultural center. In 1980 it was successively renovated and refunctioned as a sociocultural center in independent management by the association “Bürgerzentrum Alte Feuerwache e.V.” (C2) (Alte Feuerwache Köln, 2021).

The manager of the center has a background in business administration and has extensive experience working in the bank sector. The past decade she was working in the controlling, accounting and finance of organizations in the social and arts field. Normally, the center is managed by two managers. One focuses more on pedagogical and content-related issues and the other one on commercial management. The interview was held with the commercial management, which was taking both management roles, as the other management role was not occupied at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview the manager was at the center for 6 months (C2).

There are around 7-8 permanent positions in the pedagogic department of the center. Besides the members and the board of directors there are now no volunteers working at the center (C2).

3.3 Research Process Design

Yin (2018) highlights the importance of triangulation methods, which helps in strengthening construct validity of case studies. In following Yin (2018), this study is emphasizing data triangulation, meaning the use of multiple sources of evidence such as statutes of the community centers, official documents of the cooperation of the community centers, and the conceptual framework of the community centers in Cologne in order to enhance validity and reliability of the findings. The research design is kept "flexible, iterative, and continuous," allowing for the repeated adjustment of the sampling plan and interview focus at different stages, potentially narrowing their scope. This approach also involves continuously refining the research throughout the process, incorporating new questions or topics in later interviews to keep the study dynamic and responsive to emerging insights (Flick, 2007).

3.3.1 Desk research

The focus of the research has a “de facto” characteristics, which means that semi-structured interviews and the experience with managers is the primary source for investigations. Still, to complement the knowledge of the managers, desk research will be conducted. Desk research will focus on:

- Official documents of the city, such as the Conceptual Framework of the centers, and household budget of the City of Cologne
- Statutes of the associations

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Yin (2018) states that interviews are “one of the most important sources of case study evidence”. Interviews can take various forms, from an entirely open interaction between researcher and participant to an highly structured interview in which participants are interviewed in “an almost survey-like” fashion (Knott, Rao, Summers, & Teeger, 2022).

In this research, semi-structured interviews have been chosen as a data collection technique, which can be considered the most popular form of interview (Knott et al., 2022). This form of interview is “located somewhere between the extremes of the completely standardized and the completely unstandardized interviewing structures” (Berg & Lune, 2017, p. 69). As this research runs along the line of predetermined topics, this form of interview seems feasible. It offers a guidance through the inclusion of predetermined questions (Berg & Lune, 2017). These questions are generally posed to each interviewee in a systematic and consistent sequence. However, interviewers have the flexibility to diverge from the set order; they are encouraged (and expected) to explore topics more deeply beyond the responses to their pre-established questions (Berg & Lune, 2017). This is assumed to be a method which does justice to the case study design, as it sets boundaries but also leaves place for new findings and topics which could emerge during the interview.

3.3.2.1 Design

The interview guide was developed based on the research question, breaking it down into subtopics and subsequently specific questions (Gläser & Laudel, 2009, p. 60). To facilitate the collection of comparable and somewhat more organized data, an interview guide was developed. The topic guide was established by orienting on the research question (as stated above), therefore on the established key characteristics of sociocultural centers and the relationship to the local government. The guide determined the key topics and central questions, designed to provide guidance throughout the interview. Still, the possibility for flexibility and instinctive reaction of the researcher and interviewee, has been used extensively, but with care. Open-ended questions and the pursue arising issues instinctively, delivered insights into topics and issues which go beyond the initial considerations (Berg & Lune, 2017). Additional questions were posed to steer the interview in the (assumed) right direction, and order of questions was adjusted to ensure a natural flow of conversation (Gläser & Laudel, 2009).

Several measures have been taken to ensure an open and flexible conversation. As starting questions, such of descriptive and bibliographical nature have been chosen, which on the one hand are related to the topics, but on the other hand general and simple to answer (Knott et al.,

2022). To gain deeper insights into the topics, help interviewees to answer questions and ensure a natural flow of conversation the interviewer used “probes” and “non-verbal-cues” to e.g. encourage the participants to dive deeper into certain topics (Knott et al., 2022, p. 4). In line with the research design the focus and individual questions were refined and adjusted throughout the research process (Flick, 2007). This approach was expected to maximize depth and validity of the collected data.

3.3.2.2 Participants

Yin highlights the importance about finding “knowledgeable” people to interview and to do justice to the “in-depth” characteristic of case studies, sampling for interviews in case studies is about “finding the right people – those who have made the experience relevant for the study” (Flick, 2007, p. 80). Therefore, sampling is done purposefully and reflects the perceived experience and knowledge about the centers.

Purposeful sampling was used to select knowledgeable participants (Flick, 2007). Managers responsible for the centers' agendas, daily operations, and public relations were interviewed, along with an expert advisor from Cologne's community centers unit. This ensures a holistic view of the centers' activities and government relationships. An interview with a local artist provided insights into cultural participation and education.

Expert interviews			
Interviewee	**Role**	**Professional background**	**Length of involvement**
Bürgerhaus Kalk (M1)	Manager	Expertise in social, pedagogic, arts field	> 5 years
Bürgerzentrum Ehrenfeld (C1)	Manager	Economic background, politics, civil society	> 2 years
Bürgerhaus Alte Feuerwache (C2)	Administrative Manager	Business administration in banking, social and arts sectors	< 1 year
Bürgerhaus Stollwerck (C1)	Manager	Civil servant for over 20 years	> 5 years
Public Official (PO1)	Expert advisor, deputy head organizational unit	Social background, socially disadvantaged area coordinator	> 2 years
Local artist(A1)	Local Musician	Local artist in Cologne with extensive experience in the cultural sector of Cologne	

Table 1: Overview of expert interviews

3.3.2.3 Ethical considerations

The principle of informed consent is crucial in social science research when dealing with human subjects (Gläser & Laudel, 2009) In the research involving data collection from individuals, informed consent was obtained based on a template from Erasmus University Rotterdam. This consent form was distributed to and signed by all interviewees.

Key aspects of the informed consent included, among other things:

- Transparent sharing of available information on objectives
- Agreement on the recording of interviews
- Anonymity of interviewees: names were not disclosed, though names of their organizations and their roles were.
- Confidentiality information was provided
- The use of data was accepted through the participants

Participants were informed of potential limitations to their anonymity due to the disclosure of organizational affiliations and roles. Additionally, a privacy related checklist was completed by the researcher and supervisor to ensure compliance with privacy standards.

3.3.3 Methods of empirical analysis

After defining the data collection process, sampling process, and interview conditions, the method for data analysis must be defined. This research follows the qualitative content analysis approach according to Mayring (2015), combining the systemic and rule guided nature of quantitative analysis with the deep understanding of the qualitative analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2009).

Mayring (2015, p. 67) defines “three basic forms of interpretation”: summary, explication, and structuring. These are independent analyzing techniques that can be combined (Mayring, 2015). In a rather deductive fashion this research comes with a question and predefined categories. According Mayring (2015) this fits with the structuring approach, in which specific categories are predetermined and used to evaluate and analyze the relevant sections of the material. However, it might be unlikely to think that all of the relevant categories can be foreseen prior the analysis. Mayring (2015) therefore suggests that a test run of the material is conducted to check, whether the categories, definitions, anchor examples, and coding rules are applicable and clear. Contrary to Mayring and in line with Gläser and Laudel (2009) the category system will be kept “open”, allowing for supplementation and refinement rather than complete replacement. entirely. This aligns with the prioritization of open questions and the openness to new topics arising during data collection (Flick, 2007).

Coding rules were defined to organize the material in the category system (see Appendix 2). The predefined codes and categories were orienting on the research question and predefined variables, other categories and variables were defined where the material did not fit the predefined ones.

3.4 Operationalization

To ensure the operationalizations focus on the measurement, rather than the theoretical explanation, the detailed discussions and citations of studies and theories underlying the measurement are in the literature review. This operationalization feeds from that section.

Relationship to the municipality		
Sub-variable	**Description**	**Indicator**
Type and extent of municipality support	Level and type of support (financial, material, legislative) provided by the government to sociocultural centers	-perceived amount and reliability of support -perceived availability of support -perceived provision of resources (buildings or equipment) -total amount and proportion of funding - perceived constraints coming with support - perceived dependency coming with support
Collaboration & Partnership	- extent and nature of collaborative efforts and partnerships between centers and government agencies	-perceived involvement in co-production of policies -perceived diversity of collaborative projects -frequency of interaction with government representatives -agreements or MOUs with government agencies
Institutional Environment	Regulatory environment in which the centers are acting which is bound to the organizational structure of the centers	-Reporting requirements -Licenses required for the operation of the center -Legal limitations on operational hours, affecting the center -Legal requirements on personnel issues -Perceived alignment with cultural policies -standardization of procedures - defined roles and responsibilities (level of professionalization) -level of hierarchical structures
Key characteristics of sociocultural centers		
Sub-variable	**Description**	**Indicator**
Self-administration	Ability of the center to manage its operation independent from the city	-perceived autonomy in decision-making -proportion of self -generated funding -perceived autonomy in financial decisions (budgeting, funds, revenue generation -perceived autonomy in human resource management -perceived autonomy in service implementation -policy influence without external interference
Cultural participation & education	Variety and accessibility of cultural & cultural educational programs	-Program diversity -Programs for cultural education -attending/ receiving programs -Producing/performing/ interactive program -Attendance rates -Feedback and engagement of participants in programs
Grassroots, user orientation & democratic decision-making	Degree to which community is involved in decision-making processes Process in place ensuring inclusive and transparent decision-making	-Community involvement: in planning and executing -User feedback: mechanisms to provide feedback -Measures to ensure accessibility -Initiatives origin: how many initiatives are user driven ideas -perceived inclusivity in decision-making process -Use of voting consensus methods -perceived transparency in decision-making -citizen representation in governance bodies

Table 2: Operationalization of variables

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Chapter 3 already provides measures regarding reliability and validity, but due to the special conditions of the case study design, it could be perceived as important to readdress those issues separately. This research followed Yin (2018) as a main guidance to ensure validity and reliability.

3.5.1 Reliability

This study follows a multiple case study design, which is recognized for more robust and valuable insights than single-cases study designs (Yin, 2018).

A case study protocol has been created, which is also evident through the structured approach to data collection and standardized processes (Yin, 2018). All data is stored in a comprehensive case study database to ensure consistency and allow for verification (Yin, 2018). This especially includes the storage of records and transcripts of semi-structured interviews, as well as documents for desk research. Detailed procedures for case selection and research process design, such as expert consultation mirroring the use of pilot cases are documented (Yin, 2018).

Furthermore, triangulation through the use of multiple sources of evidence supports maintaining a chain of evidence and the reliability of the data collected (Yin, 2018).

The use of semi-structured interviews with a consistent set of predetermined questions helps to ensure that data is collected in a systematic and comparable manner (Flick, 2007). Purposeful sampling ensures that the information gathered is relevant and reliable (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

3.5.2 Validity

Construct validity is enhanced through data triangulation, which ensures that findings are supported by multiple evidence (Yin, 2018). Also the use of an interview guide based on the research question helps to ensure that data collection is relevant to the constructs being studied (Flick, 2007).

Internal validity is enhanced through a flexible and iterative approach, which allows for adjustment of sampling plan and interview focus as new insights emerge (Flick, 2007). The study considers potential biases in case selection and addresses them by consulting and purposeful sampling (Yin, 2018).

External validity and generalizability are enhanced through the use of a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018). However, it is recognized that the case study design is still inferior to other research designs in ensuring external validity (Yin, 2018)

4. Empirical findings & analysis

Before diving deeper into the explanations of the different variables investigated and the effects regarding them, a brief description of the context is provided, to help the reader understand the cases in place better.

4.1 Context of the centers

The *Bürgerhäuser* and *Bürgerzentren* have long been part of the city's infrastructure and were officially recognized in 1977, with the term sociocultural center synonymous with *Bürgerhäuser, Bürgerzentren* and *Nachbarschaftsheim* (neighbourhood homes) (Stadt Köln, 2007). In 2007 the *Rahmenkonzept Kölner Bürgerhäuser und Bürgerzentren* (Conceptual framework for Cologne's Bürgerhäuser and Bürgerzentren) was developed in close collaboration with the community centers and stakeholders and approved in 2008 by the city council. This framework outlines the organizational structure and tasks of these centers and remains their baseline framework, acknowledging the differences due to vary neighborhoods (Stadt Köln, 2007). The guiding principles for the centers outlined in the framework are:

The guiding principles outlined here are:

1. Facilitation of Encounter and Dialogue: The community centers and civic centers are intended to serve as vibrant and open meeting places that foster social, cultural, and political dialogues among people.
2. Active Participation in Neighborhood Development: These facilities aim to actively participate in shaping the neighborhood and district with the goal of improving the quality of life for the population. This includes promoting the integration of all cultures and social strata, as well as fostering connections between generations.
3. Activation for Self-Responsible Action and Volunteer Engagement: The community centers and civic centers aim to activate as many people as possible to take self-responsible action and/or engage in volunteer activities.
4. Provision of Services for Citizens: These establishments are intended to serve as service providers for residents in the neighborhood and district, acting as an information platform and offering advisory services.

They have shaped the cultural and social life of the city for decades, with the first Bürgerhaus was founded in 1947 by the quakers (Quäker Nachbarschaftsheim e.V., 2018). The founders and responsible bodies between the community centers vary. Many, as in line with the nature of sociocultural centers are coming from a history of active citizenship and even occupation of old houses (Kölner Elf, n.d.), they were founded by community initiatives, welfare association, and the municipality (Kölner Elf, n.d.; Stadt Köln, 2007).

Four of the centers are in direct stewardship of the municipality, the others are in stewardship of social and welfare associations, and community initiatives. Citizen participation is central and occurs through elected advisory boards or active memberships in association boards. (Stadt Köln, 2007).

In 2005 the centers in Cologne formed a coalition called “Kölner Elf” to represent their interests (Bürgerhaus Stollwerck, 2024a). The coalition is organized by the city but with shared agenda-setting (C1) and comes together every 6 weeks for “professional exchange”, planning of joint activities and a representation towards the city (M1,C1,C2,M2,C1). They also use this coalition to be “a strong voice in the urban society” (M1).

4.2 Collaboration & Partnerships

4.2.1 Dialogue

Meetings between the municipality and community centers take place every 6 weeks, involving the center representatives (mostly managers) and public officials (M1,M2,C1,C2,PO1). These meetings, featuring lectures on relevant topics, are vital for professional exchange and service coordination (M1, M2, C1, C2, PO1). All managers highlight the importance of the meetings for information exchange and representing the centers’ interests towards the city (M1, C1, C2).

Moreover, regular meetings between MC managers and public officials address specific municipal aspects of daily business, such as public procurement and regulations, without additional benefits (PO1).

4.2.2 Shared Vision & Mission

The centers collaboration mostly consists of the shared activities and dialogue between the “Kölner Elf” (M1,M2,C1,C2). It is an important aspect of the managers work and delivers a shared vision of inclusivity and diversity, which is part of every centers goal (M1,M2,C1,C2).

Apart from this coalition, organized by the city, not much seems to be contributed by the city (M1,C1,C2). All managers, feel a lack of prioritization of sociocultural centers in the municipal administration (M1,M2,C1,C2). C1 states: “they leave us alone, but there is also no support” and M1 says “we are part of the Department of Social Affairs where we are the only ‘Voluntary Service’ but of course the Department is under much more pressure to implement all the ‘mandatory services’, like homelessness, asylum, and so on. Therefore, the main focus is always on those issues.”

4.2.3 Networks

While the Kölner Elf coalition is significant and persistent, neighborhood networks seem crucial for reliable service delivery (M1, C1, C2). M1 says: I'm in a good network with the other players here in the social area and I know who offers which counseling services, so I don't need to do that as well”. These networks, both informal and formal, include neighborhood conferences (M1) and social welfare associations (C1, C2) that provide support and in case of CCs also funding. M2 is not part of any official neighborhood network besides the collaboration with the city, but as a manager he is part of the board of the supporting association, which is led by citizen.

4.3 Institutional Environment

4.3.1 Legal form and organizational implications

The relationship to the municipality affects the legal form of the centers.

4.3.1.1 Community-led centers

The CCs operate as non-profit associations, with around 100 members and a board of directors (C1, C2). Service delivery, including the management, is primarily handled by professionals (C1, C2, PO1). Members participate in strategic decisions through the AGM (C1, C2) and working groups (C2). Members elect the board of directors, responsible for managerial and supervising aspects, such as financial and personnel matters, as well as strategic matters (C1, C2). Members and the board of directors serve on voluntary basis (C1, C2).

4.3.1.2 Municipality-led centers

MCs are part of the municipal administration and subject to municipal regulations (M1, M2, PO1). Instead of an elected board of directors, the city is responsible of supervising the centers (M1, M2, PO1).

4.3.2 Legal & Regulatory context

MCs face additional regulations imposed by the city, leading to (M1,M2,PO1). As PO1 says those regulations have some influence on the centers: “The municipal administration of Cologne is somewhat hierarchical organized, when we look at the organizational chart. In the end, this has some influence on the centers, which is why I would say that they are a bit more hierarchically structured as the free centers.” (PO1).

Despite the MCs being influenced and organized bureaucratically, the core team within all centers operate through collaborative decision-making (C1, C2, M1, M2).

Municipal financing for all centers comes from the Department of Social Affairs (M1,M2,C1,C2,PO1). As the interviewees emphasize, the centers are a “voluntary service”, which is an additional service of the municipality, contrary to legally required “mandatory services”, such as childcare or other responsibilities of social welfare (M1,M2,C1,C2,PO1). It seems like the Department of Social Affairs is responsible for a lot of “mandatory services”, which seems to be the reason why sociocultural centers are underprioritized (M1, M2, C1, C2, PO1). Additionally, a “regulatory failure” arises from placing real estate in the seems to be the placement of the real estate in the budget of the Department (C1). Most infrastructure consists of listed buildings with high maintenance costs, which are covered by the centers’ budget (C1, C2, M1, M2, PO1) instead of the Department for Real Estate (C1).

4.3.2.1 Rahmenkonzept der Kölner Bürgerhäuser und Bürgerzentren

The *Rahmenkonzept Kölner Bürgerhäuser und Bürgerzentren* (Conceptual Framework) provides overarching guidelines for sociocultural centers in Cologne, developed with these institutions and confirmed by the city council (PO1) (Stadt Köln, 2007). It sets a shared goal for the centers, serving as flexible guidance to create neighborhood-specific programs (C1,M1,M2,PO1). However, the broad scope makes it challenging for the centers to fully meet all guidance (M1).

4.4 Financing and non-financial support

4.4.1 Community-led centers

CCs have multiple income streams: municipal funding, room rental, commercial operations, and third-party funding. The proportions vary annually. (C1, C2, PO1)

CC1's budget is around 2,2 Mio €, from which around 36% is project acquisition (third-party funds and foundations), 32% commercial business operations, 20% operating cost subsidies (from the municipality), and around 11% for room rental, whereby donations and membership contributions are almost negligible (C1).

CC2 has a slightly lower budget, from which 50% are municipal operating cost subsidies, around a third is project acquisitions (from third-party funds and foundations), and the rest from room rental (C2).

Operating cost subsidies are mainly there to cover costs which are not generating income, such as pedagogical offerings (C2, PO1), it is the only stable income on which the community-led centers can rely, as the other positions are either fluctuating or short-term project-funds (C1,C2).

Project related third party acquisition is one of the biggest sources for CCs funding and is always bound to timely restricted funding (C1, C2). The problem with project based funding is that the centers are "covering background noise; problems which are not solved from one day to the next, such as poverty, [...] participation of young and old" (C1), which need more stable funding (C1, C2). Furthermore, the application for funds requires a lot of resources (C1, C2). C1 sees it as a core task for CC managers and sees it "accompanied by a tremendous amount of pressure to acquire so much money" (C1). C2 sees the administrative burden as main constraint in acquisition of third-party funding.

4.4.2 Municipality-led centers

The budgets for the municipality-led centers were not disclosed, but both are funded 100% by the municipality (M1,M2,PO1), with occasional additional community support (M2). Their full budgets are approved two years in advance, providing stability (M1,M2,PO1).

4.4.3 Financial implications

Both MCs and CCs face financial constraints and rising costs (M1,C1,C2,M2). Differences in MCs and CCs resources are not fully investigable due to missing budget information. The managers do not see big differences, as their budget can be reduced equally (M1, C1, C2). MCs and managers are seen as "little bit better financed" (C1), with less budget and personnel responsibility (C1), and "more relaxed" (C2), because they do not have to worry about their jobs, as in case of closure munici-pal employees would be transferred but not fired (M1, C1, C2).

M1 & C1 state that municipal resource allocation has decreased in proportion to rising costs. PO1 & C1 note that the payment amounts are historically determined and tied to inflation. All managers cite rising costs, such as energy and personnel, as reasons for decreased program budgets.

Opposed to MCs, the rise in personnel costs is a major threat for CCs (C1, C2). MCs personnel are not included in the managers budget, as they are paid by the municipality (M1, M2, PO1).

Managers and public officials highlight that sociocultural centers, with 1,5 million annual visitors, receive 3,8€ million from the city, whereas "high culture" institutions with 185.000 visitors receive 60€ million, emphasizing the disparity in funding (M1, C1, PO1). As their focus is on offering cultural services, M1 & C2 propose funding from the Cultural Department.

4.4.4 Non-financial support

The non-financial support relates to the properties used by the centers. Most are refunctioned listed buildings with high maintenance requirements, provided by the municipality free of charge (C1, C2, PO1).

4.5 Self-administration

4.5.1 Financial autonomy

All centers depend on municipal funding, limiting their financial autonomy. Managers agree that the allocated resources are insufficient (M1,C1,C2,M2).

For CCs, decreasing municipal funding is primarily due to rising tariffs for professional staff (C1, C2). C1 states: "So purely from a business perspective, I would have to try to get people out every 3 years and bring in new people who then cost less." C2 states: "The salaries here are rising exorbitantly, but the operating cost subsidies are not increasing accordingly, [...]. In fact, I would have to tell people to gradually switch to part-time work."

4.5.1.1 Budgetary allocations

Budgetary allocation and subsidies are tied to performance and target agreements (C1,C2,M1,M2,PO1), but these do not heavily restrict budget use (C1, C2, M1, M2). Managers can mostly adjust their municipal budgets as needed, as the voluntary services they offer are not subject to strict guidelines. The conceptual framework provides broad guidelines, allowing for flexibility in their actions.

For CCs, municipal funds and self-generated incomes are flexible, but third-party funding is time-restricted and project-specific (C1,C2).

4.5.1.2 Income disposition

4.5.1.2.1 Municipality-led centers

MCs cannot dispose of their generated income due to municipal administration regulations (M1,M2,PO1). M2 states: "We always had trouble with the manager of the café downstairs, and they have not always been compatible with our cultural operations [...]. If we could do that on our own that would be good. With the generated income we could spend way more on our operations." M1 says: "If I budget very well and do meet my annual targets early, when things go well and I am 20.000€ over, then I am not allowed to keep it and reinvest it into the house. That's a bit of a shame". Additionally to that, MC1&2 are mostly solely financed by the city and are not eligible for project funding (M1,M2,PO1).

4.5.1.2.2 Community-led centers

CCs however have free autonomy on their income generation and are highly dependent on their generated incomes to fund their organizational operations (C1,C2).

4.5.2 Personnel autonomy

4.5.2.1 Municipality-led centers

Due to their incorporation into the municipalities administration, MCs face strict regulatory constraints in human resource management (M1, M2, PO1). Staffing decision are made outside the centers (M1,M2,C1). M2 states that they are in need for new employees and "everyone works overtime" and M1 says "every year I ask for personnel and they say no every year" (M1). Hiring, firing and promotion are regulated by the municipality, limiting personnel autonomy (M1, M2, C1, PO1).

4.5.2.2 Community-led centers

CCs do not face regulatory restrictions but struggle with financial constraints affecting staffing (C1,C2). Employees are partially funded by municipal subsidies or short-term projects, requiring constant funding applications (C1,C2). Due to those financial constraints, employees in the MCs often get paid less than market value, which can make it hard to find people (C1,C2).

4.5.3 Strategic autonomy

Strategic autonomy involves the autonomy of taking decisions outside the realm of financial and human resources constraints, but there is a strong link between the perceived budget autonomy and strategic autonomy, as the budget somewhat explains the implementation of services.

All of the managers see that a level of freedom is needed in the implementation of programs and services, as the neighborhoods vary in their interests and needs (M1,C1,C2,M2,C1). They also state that this level of freedom is given to them, apart of financial constraints (M1,C1,C2,M2).

4.5.3.1 Municipality-led centers

For MCs there is agreement on the level of freedom the centers have in the implementation of programs. M1 says they are "very free" and that the municipality "gives us a lot of freedom [...] and I have made quite a few changes content-wise." M2 feels there is freedom within the existing budget and the possibility to reallocate funds to different services as needed, but there is also the formality to apply for.

4.5.3.2 Community-led centers

CC managers value their level of freedom apart from the financial constrained they are facing (C1,C2). The managers felt a lack of commitment as "neither in the sponsorship agreement nor in the discussions [...] is a clear understanding of the mission and the use of funds" (C1), which comes with an unclarity on what they should provide and how much they can finance with the subsidies (C1,C2).

4.5.4 Autonomy implications

MCs' autonomy is heavily restricted by municipal regulations, primarily in financial and personnel matters. However, strategic autonomy seems to come with only little restrictions, as the cen-

ters are mostly free in the implementation of their services. This aligns with the broad Conceptual Framework for sociocultural centers, allowing neighborhood-specific implementation.

CCs', while not restricted by regulations, apart from third-party funding, face significant financial constraints. Despite higher financial and personnel autonomy compared to MCs, CCs struggle with rising costs and limited municipal subsidies.

Overall, CCs are considered more autonomous than MCs.

4.6 Grassroots orientation and democratic decision-making

4.6.1 Institutionalized channels

4.6.1.1 Municipality-led centers

For MCs, citizen involvement is taken into account through the election of advisory boards (C1)(Stadt Köln, 2007). The advisory boards regulations provide for the election of ten citizens of different age groups and local representatives of parties and associations (Stadt Köln, 2007). The board is advising in matters of programs and strategic orientation of the centers (Stadt Köln, 2007). However, the importance and weighing of the board is varying between the centers. M1 sees the advisory board as an important channel to get in touch with the community, identify community needs and include citizens into the decision-making process. Beyond their defined tasks, they are actively involved in meetings and events of the center (M1). For M2, one could say the advisory board is not taking a high priority, as the elections have been postponed since around 2 years, and there is no advisory board in place (M2).

4.6.1.2 Community-led centers

CCs are per legal form and their stipulations centers which are including community members in their overall strategy (D2,D3). Influences on the long-term strategy and on the direction of the centers are taken in the AGM, and especially indirectly through the election of board members (C1,C2). Even though not all of the members are necessarily active (C1,C2), it represents a form of citizen participation in the centers and a form of power for the members. The legitimacy of the management is therefore (indirectly) provided by citizen. One CC also has an advisory board (C2), which has an advising role (Alte Feuerwache Köln, 2024)(C2). Membership is open for all citizens (C1, C2). C2 also names the opportunity for members to get involved in working groups, which are active in practical, hands-on or strategic tasks. C2 also highlights the burden that comes with democratic decision-making, as those processes are "enormously time-consuming".

4.6.2 informal channels

4.6.2.1 Municipality-led centers

M1 emphasized the need for active engagement in events and daily activities, to get in touch with citizen through informal channels, which seems to be an integral aspect of their work and determination of needs (M1). M1 sees the necessity to involve citizen actively in the program. Moreover, there are about 80 volunteers involved in daily activities of the center, from cooking to giving workshops (M1), which highlights the importance of citizen involvement. On the other hand, the other center sees different paths of community involvement. M2 still sees informal ways of communication as the main channel for citizen and highlights that there are always sug-

gestions from the community, but takes a rather passive approach, relying on community suggestions ("they are always coming to us, when there is something").

4.6.2.2 Community-led centers

C1 cites community-initiated projects as crucial, such as sports for disabled people, community gardening and others. He sees one main aspect of their work in the provision of space, or the translation of citizen needs into project proposals. C2 sees the administrative burden and internal conflicts as a main reason for why citizen involvement and especially involvement of volunteers has been lacking in the past months, but normally there would be more involvement. C1 also highlights that the participative nature of the center seems to be lacking through the financial constraints and administrative burden that comes with it, on the other hand members are actively participating in daily business tasks of the centers (C2).

4.6.3 Volunteers

4.6.3.1 Municipality-led centers

The municipal centers show huge differences in the involvement of volunteers. MC2 is only involving "very few" volunteers whereas MC1 has around 80 volunteers a year which are involved in events and the design of workshops, which are partly done by people in the neighborhood (M1).

4.6.3.2 Community-led centers

In CC1, 100-120 volunteers are involved in daily activities and (C1), but C1 also sees a clear distinction on the tasks in which volunteers can and want to be involved, depending on the size of the organization: "For example accounting. It is no problem to find someone in my other association, because there are people that want to volunteer in that, but in a professional structure with 27 full-time equivalents, this is a problem." In CC2, C2 sees the clear constraints by the administrative burdens, inner conflicts, and restructuring of infrastructure, which have to be settled first. Besides the working groups there are no other tasks in which volunteers are involved, because volunteers also need to be "guided by professionals" about which C2 is "quite sure that we can find it, once we are back with the full team soon".

4.6.4 Democratic implications

CCs are more participative due to their organization as associations. They offer members the opportunity to co-decide on strategic decisions, with professional employees managing daily operations. Citizens can join as members and shape long-term strategies, highlighting the participative nature of CCs.

MCs involve citizens through advisory boards, which are democratic but non-binding. The presence and effectiveness of those boards vary, with MC2 lacking an active board. Citizen involvement in MCs depends largely on the managers' willingness to implement community advice. MC1 shows high citizen involvement in daily activities with citizen co-producing in the program, while MC2 takes citizen into account, but follows a rather advisory approach.

Both, MCs and CCs utilize informal channels and volunteers, but the extent varies. Citizen participation is heavily influenced by the institutional environment, regulations, and organizational structures of the centers. These factors set the baseline for participation, but other elements

also play a role. CCs see a restriction in the extent of participation due to financial constraints and administrative burdens.

4.7 Cultural participation & education

Looking at different centers and their approaches to cultural participation, we can clearly see the remaining priority of the centers to provide cultural services and programs. What we do see is the priority of the centers to provide an inclusive space for people (M1,C1,C2,M2). However, what we also do see is the differences in how those services are brought to the users. This does not seem entirely dependent on the legal form of the centers.

4.7.1 Dimensions of cultural participation & education

4.7.1.1 Municipality-led centers

M2 sees every service they are offering as equal and sets no focal point, emphasizing performances, exhibitions, and spaces for established artists. With its broad service delivery MC2 does not provide cultural education itself, apart from some artists who are renting studios that give some art workshops (M2). Program selection for performances outsourced to an agency (M2). Looking at the cultural program, one can see that the agency seems to put a focus on established artists and bigger events (Bürgerhaus Stollwerck, 2024b). In line with that, the prices seem to be higher than in other centers, although there are offered discounts on some events (which is the case for all of the other centers) (Bürgerhaus Stollwerck, 2024b)(M1, C1, C2). A local musician also confirms that there is no big opportunity for smaller artists to rent the practice rooms, as they are already rented out long term to established artists (A1). Furthermore, the local musician says that the concert halls are too expensive to rent for smaller artists and the usual opportunity of funding through beverage sales is no longer available, as this is handled by the agency (A1). Therefore, a clear focus on established artists, with no opportunity for smaller artists and citizen for cultural self-realization can be noticed.

Conversely, M1 shifted focus of the center from bigger events to low-threshold performances (M1). The focus is on offering programs for people to participate in a receiving and interacting characteristic (M1). They set a big focus on “cultural focus for youth and children” and on “open offers for people to experience different cultural techniques, such as woodcraft, pottery, knittery” just to name a few (M1). Everything can also be attended without money (M1). Furthermore, once a month a stage is offered for local and semi-professional artists and amateurs to show their performances (M1).

4.7.1.2 Community-led centers

CCs prioritize offering space for minority groups to self-organize and express their culture (C1,C2). The focus is on offering performances and workshops which are affordable or free and a vast variety on receiving/attending but also productive program is offered (C1,C2). Both managers however do state the need to offer events of more commercial nature, in order to finance their operations (C1,C2). C1 feels very limited in their cultural events and says there is no way to expand the cultural work right now, because of a lack of financial support by the city. C2 says that 20 years ago the center shifted their focus on offering stages and rooms to professional art-

ists which are subsidized, and on a more professionalized cultural operation. The local musician confirms that the opportunity to perform is not offered for semi-professional artists and amateurs, at least not on a regular basis (A1). However, the space for amateur groups is still there to practice and perform on a small stage (C2). C2 makes it clear that in her work at an independent theater, a six-figure sum in institutional funding was provided for 150 performance days. In the center, with professionalized cultural operations, there is no funding provided for 150 performance days.

4.7.2 Implications for cultural participation & education

Most centers, expect one MC, cover both “receiving” and “production” apsects of cultural participation and education. CCs focus on providing spaces for minority groups but are constrained by financial means, often relying on project funding, which limits long-term cultural work. CCs might need to host commercial events to sustain operations. Cultural participation is constrained by financial means (M1,M2,C1,C2).

MCs do receive stable income which could be helpful in planning cultural activities and the general program (M1). The program and therefore the focus of cultural centers in MCs is more likely to be influenced by the managers, as the centers are relatively free in their program execution, and also no other controlling factor such as a board of directors or members have active participation power.MC2, however, lacks emphasis on cultural education and self-realization spaces for amateurs.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The actual research work contributes to the field of community-based initiatives, the work of sociocultural centers, and their different approaches to interactive governance.

The analysis of two municipality-led (MC1, MC2) and two community-led (CC1, CC2) sociocultural centers in Cologne revealed significant insights into how the relationship with the local government affects the sociocultural nature of the centers.

Sociocultural centers have been undergoing changes in the past decades, affecting, in particular, their approaches to provide services. The investigated community-led sociocultural centers have undergone processes of rationalization and professionalization, making them heavily reliant on professional employees and management (in line with e.g. Hwang and Powell (2009)). As a consequence, the CC managers experience an administrative burden when it comes to the use of third-party funds (in line with Vincent (2006)).

Contrary to Smith et al. (1995), compliance and reporting requirements imposed by the local government do not appear to impair the strategic autonomy and level of decentralization of the centers. The managers (especially of the CCs) rather emphasize the level of freedom they have to allocate the budget provided by the local government and to realize their services. This corresponds to the individual characteristics of the neighborhoods in which the centers operate.

However, the MC centers face a high level of restrictions regarding their autonomy. Main restrictions arise from the regulatory environment in which MCs operate, impinging on their financial and personnel autonomy. The restrictions are partly entailed by the public administration,

characterized by high levels of bureaucracy as well as the fragmentation of responsibilities and regulations (in line with German public administration as seen in e.g. Kuhlmann et al. (2021)). CCs, on the other hand, are less restricted by regulations of the local government than by financial dependencies and constraints, partly affecting their financial and personnel autonomy.

Regarding citizen participation and their grassroots & user orientation, the differences in the characters of MCs and CCs emerge, in line with literature on interactive governance (e.g. Edelenbos and van Meerkerk (2016b) Torfing (2012)). As can be seen in MCs, local governments appear to be hesitant to provide citizens with substantial and institutionalized participative power. Democratic elements such as the election of advisory boards exist but are restricted to their advisory nature. This means that the MC managers are to decide whether to act upon advice or not. Informal channels seem highly influential. The lack of institutionalized citizen participation makes informal channels most influential for MCs, which also suggest a strong dependency of citizen participation on leadership styles, especially in MCs. CCs, on the other hand, and in line with the literature on CBIs (e.g. Igalla et al. (2021)), enable citizens to shape the organization and exert co-decision power, although the grassroots character seems to become somewhat "professionalized" with time and size. However, the financial restrictions, especially expressed through the administrative burden, are constraints to citizen participation in CCs.

Both MCs and CCs have in common a focus on neighborhood-specific services rather than providing overall and unspecific services.

The main goal of the sociocultural centers, whether MCs or CCs, is to provide cultural participation opportunities to the citizens. Apparently, there is no "goal displacement" as reported by Gonzales (2010).

Differences between MCs and CCs are not only determined by the relationship with the local government. As could be observed in the MCs under consideration, the approach to cultural participation is strongly shaped by the management in place. CCs, in contrast, have different levels of control such as boards and members in place, which also contribute to the profile of the centers. Cultural participation and education seem to be influenced by financial means, especially the provision of stable income, which seems to be lacking in CCs. The relationship to the local government plays a crucial role for MCs to provide adequate income, for CCs in the lack of stable income. Furthermore, CCs are in need to offer more commercially focused cultural events in order to fund cultural operations. However, the CC cultural participation and education programs are not inferior to the MCs' programs.

Collaboration and partnerships play a significant role in the functioning of these centers. Regular meetings between MCs and CCs facilitate professional exchange and service coordination. These meetings, held every six weeks, involve representatives from the centers as well as public officials and are crucial to promote the interests of the centers towards the municipal administration. Nevertheless, the center managers (from MCs or CCs likewise) perceive a lack of acknowledgement and too little support for sociocultural centers within the municipal administration.

The financial implications for these centers are significant. CCs must manage fluctuating income sources, including third-party funds, commercial operations, and room rentals, while MCs receive more stable, but often insufficient, municipal funding. This financial instability affects their ability to plan and sustain long-term cultural and educational programs.

It may be concluded that the relationship to the local government comes with benefits and costs as stated in the literature review, with multiple impacts on the work of the sociocultural

centers. The four *Bürgerhäuser* under investigation show the key characteristics of sociocultural centers, but to different extents. All centers maintain the overarching characteristic of sociocultural centers which can be found since the beginning in the 1970's: the will to provide services for citizens, include people regardless of their characteristics, and serve the neighborhood in which they are located. The centers provide proposals for people to connect and form friendships, tasks which seem to be more and more important in times of conflict and populism.

6. Recommendations

There is a vast variety of concepts and dimensions which have been outlined, therefore the potential for further research is broad. Based in this research design, a recommendation would be to broaden the regional scope and compare different centers of different regions to gain new insights on the different impacts on the nature of sociocultural centers. This could be for example a comparison between the former Western and Eastern German states, or between German sociocultural centers and non-German cultural centers. This would be especially interesting in countries in which public administration is not as bureaucratic and based on *Rechtsstaat* as Germany (e.g. The Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark). Furthermore, the impact of leaderships styles has been investigated extensively, but seems to have a great impact on the values and key characteristics of these centers. It could also be an implication that the leaders background is decisive for the impact of the centers work. This is less surprising, but it might be worth to explore, how regulations and support could be modified to ensure individual management being less decisive on certain characteristics.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

The interview guide was in manner of the "flexible, iterative, and continuous" approach followed in this research, revised and supplemented, during and in between interviews, in order to achieve the best possible outcomes (Flick, 2007). To achieve best possible flexibility, example follow up questions have been added complementing some interview questions.

The questions have been asked in German and have been translated to English for the purpose of this research.

Introduction & Context

1. Can you describe your role in the socio-cultural center and how long you have been involved? a) What did you do before this?

2. Could you tell me about the history and mission of your socio-cultural center?

Goals

3. What are the tasks and goals of the center (and who sets them)? Are many of these determined by the city?

a) Framework concept. Is everything implemented from it?

Cultural Participation & Education

4. Can you describe the cultural activities and educational programs your center offers? How many programs do you offer?
    1. Where do you place your emphasis?
    2. How is the framework concept implemented?
    3. How many visitors do you have?
    4. Are citizens involved in the implementation and execution of the programs?

Organizational Structure, Self-Administration & Democratic Decision-Making

5. What does the organizational structure look like in [community center xy]? What does the decision-making process in your center look like? You lead the center, who else makes decisions?
    1. How many people work in the center? How many full-time employees and how many volunteers?
    2. How are decisions about resource allocation made in the center?

6. To what extent are citizens involved in shaping the agenda? a)
    1. Are there democratic decision-making processes in which members and users can participate?
    2. How does the community influence the shaping of this structure?

7. How are the needs and interests of the local community identified?

Funding & Relationship with the City Administration

8. How is your center funded?

    1. Are the funds tied to specific tasks that you must fulfill?
9. Do you receive any additional financial or non-financial support from the city? Can you provide concrete examples?
10. How does this support affect the goals, operations, and programs of your center?
11. Do you feel independent in decision-making?
    1. How does this compare to other centers?
12. Reflecting on your experiences, how do you think the city's support could be improved to better support your center and its mission?

Appendix 2: Category system

Also this category system was subject to an iterative and abductive research approach. Rather than taking fixed categories/ codes, and be prone to rigidity, the category systems have been left open and redefined with every interview transcribed. This is the initial category system.

Variables	Codes	Example
Type and Extent of Municipality Support		
	requirements coming with support	"there are target and performance agreements, which are exectued loosely"
	proportional decrease	"the subsidies decreased reltively to the budget"
	proportion of municipal support	"the operating cost subsidies are around 20% of the budget"
	perceived underfinancing	"the subsidies are simply not enough"
	operating cost-subsidies	We receive an operating cost subsidy
	budget provided	"this center is incorporated in the cities budget plan"
	infrastructure	"the buildings are provided by the city"
	personnel support	"the staff is incorporated in the cities staffing plan"
	stability of income	"we plan our budget two years in advance"
	third-party funding	"our biggest part is the acquisition of projects"
	commercial operation	"We deliver food to schools and generate income through the café"
	room rentals	"We are obliged to offer rooms, the income we can keep"
Collaboration & Partnership		
	shared vision	"there is a shared vision among the Kölner Elf"
	Joint activities	"we are together at Colognes Voluntary day"
	Dialogue	"We meet every 6 weeks"
	Co-production of Policies	"The conceptual framework has been created in collaboration"
	Committment	"they leave us alone, but there is also no support"
	networks	"I am in a good neighborhood network here..."
Institutional Environment		Workshops with government representatives help us understand policy changes.
	Regluations	"there is a set division of responsibilities, which is regulated by the city"
	hierarchies	"Looking at the organigram, the city of Cologne is somehwat hierarchical"
	legal form	"this center is organized as a registered nonprofit association"
Self-administration		
	financial autonomy	"I am not allowed to make use of the generated income, due to regulations"
	budgetary autonomy	"I can shift something in the budget"
	strategic autonomy	"I am in a satelite, far away from the city, we are very free"
	Regulations	"the target and performance regulations are not very strict"
Cultural Participation & Education		
	performning/ producing program	"every Tuesday we have a comedy program"
	attending/ receiving program	"people can come and try cultural techniques, such as knittery, woodwork, music"
	objective	"we want to offer low-threshold access to culture"
	diversity in programs	"range from comedy to belly dance"
	visitors	"Our hous has 100.000 visitors per year"
	minority focus	"we offer space for self-organization for people that dont have spaces"
Grassroots, User Orientation & Democratic Decision-making		
	advising	"We are open to critique, when they come to us, we try to implement that"
	co-production	"we have some volunteers designing some programs"
	co-deciding	"as a member you can decide on the long-term strategy of the house"
	formal	"as an association we have members and a board of directors, on voluntary basis"
	informal	"a lot happens in day-to-day business"
	use of voting	"the members elect the board in the annual general meeting"
	inner organizational democracy	"The decisions are made in the team"

Table 3: Category system